

Community in the Garden in the Community:
The Development of an Open Space Resource in Boston's South End

by

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B.A. in Geography
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Berkeley, California (2002)

Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in City Planning

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

June 2007

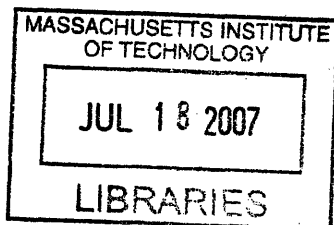
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Abstract

Now a permanently protected type of open space, the community gardens in Boston's South End began in the early 1970's as an effort to utilize vacant land in what was a predominantly low-income neighborhood. Since then, the South End has experienced steady gentrification and is now one of the most expensive neighborhoods in Boston. Despite these changes, the South End, due in part to its substantial supply of subsidized housing, has retained residents with a mix of income levels and is a neighborhood that is still known for its diversity. Much of the previous literature on the role and value of community gardens has focused primarily on low-income communities, and there has been little research on community gardens in gentrifying or similarly changing neighborhoods. The South End, therefore, is an ideal arena in which to investigate the past development and present-day role of community gardens in a changing neighborhood.

This thesis examines the role of the South End's community gardens both as places in and of themselves and as part of the larger urban landscape and community. By taking the perspective of the community in the garden *and* the garden in the community, the study explores both the dynamics of the smaller communities within the gardens and their role as a unique type of open space in the larger neighborhood and community that surrounds them. Through in-depth interviews as well as archival and observational methods, it traces the historical development of a community garden movement in the South End and also examines the specific present-day dynamics of two case study gardens. The research finds that these community gardens reflect the qualities and dynamics of the surrounding neighborhood, both in terms of its positive diversity as well as its conflicts and tensions. Furthermore, community gardens are places where these qualities are uniquely engaged through the interaction of people of different backgrounds by means of their common interest in gardening. Finally, the community gardens hold unique value for non-gardeners both as open space and as gardens, and provide lessons for the potential benefits of developing and maintaining new community gardens elsewhere.

Thesis Advisor: Sam Bass Warner, Jr.
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Acknowledgements

Like the community gardens themselves, the richness of this thesis springs from the many people who contributed toward it.

Thanks are due, first and foremost, to the gardeners, garden coordinators, and garden and community leaders for sharing their stories, reflections, and wisdom. Each interview was an inspiration, and together they were the foundation for a rare education and wonderful adventure. In particular, I would like to thank Carol Bonnar of the Worcester Street Community Garden, Rob Cleary and Eleanor Strong of the Rutland Washington Streets Community garden, Betsy Johnson of the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust, and Nancy Kafka of the Trust for Public land. Their generosity, insight, and enthusiasm will inform my work far beyond this thesis.

At MIT, thanks go to my advisor, Sam Bass Warner, Jr. and my reader Langley Keyes. I could not have asked for a more helpful, inspiring, or enjoyable thesis committee, and I am truly grateful to have had the opportunity to work with such knowledgeable, caring people. I would also like to thank Anne Whiston Spirn for informing and supporting this project. The entire experience has rounded out my time at MIT more fully than I had ever expected.

Finally, closer to home, my deep and sincere gratitude go to Mori Insinger for his unflagging support, help, encouragement, patience, enthusiasm, and inspiration, without which none of this would have been possible. The hours he spent with me discussing the project, looking over drafts, and calming my worries put my mind at ease, kept my interest fresh, and my let me heart be where it should. Rare and wonderful are the times when learning and life fall into perfect step with one another, and so they did on our walks through the gardens, the neighborhood, and beyond.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In a sense, this thesis began years ago, with a summer day's walk through a community garden. I was spending the afternoon in Boston's South End, visiting a friend who was taking me through some of the neighborhood's lesser-known places. We walked down one of the neighborhood's major thoroughways, past row houses, tree-lined side streets, and catching glimpses of long, narrow alleys with mature trees towering over the small private backyards and parked cars. Before long we came to a gate that opened to one of the neighborhood's community gardens. "Given by the City of Boston and the Boston Redevelopment Authority in 1991 for permanent public benefit to the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust, Inc." read a sign at the garden's entrance. The gate was open, and we went inside.

We walked through, along the garden's paths, looking into the plots on either side. Some of them displayed flowers, tufts of perennials in the corners, annuals along the edges, and flowering shrubs. Others contained vegetables—row of green—some in rectangular planters, some in patches. One gardener spoke with us, a white, male artist, who had lived in one of the row houses overlooking the garden for more than decade. He pointed out the variety of crops grown by gardeners of various cultures: a Chinese gardener grew bitter melon, African-Americans from the South had collard greens, and Jamaican gardeners tended callaloo. Then he pointed behind us, at a newly developed condominium complex, where the cost of residences started at half a million dollars and went up. Even people who live there have plots here, he said. The different backgrounds of gardeners were evident in the individual designs of the plots themselves. Some were purely for growing food, planted completely with vegetables. Others were a mix of vegetables and flowers, perhaps divided by stepping stones and displaying a decorative statue. Some had no food at all and were purely ornamental, arranged as miniature French gardens, with centerpieces and brick paths. The artist showed us his plot, and told us the garden was his getaway and respite. Standing there under a mature tree, attentive to the sounds of the leaves in the breeze and the smell of freshly watered soil, this garden was indeed a departure from the rhythm and feel of the rest

of the neighborhood. After a few minutes pause, we continued on, exiting the garden at the end of the path, and resuming our walk along the brick sidewalks and row house-lined streets of the South End.

This initial visit was the beginning of my longer relationship with and extensive inquiry into the community gardens of the South End. A few years later, I was a resident of the neighborhood and a gardener at one of its community gardens. Though I enjoyed these spaces simply as places to plant fresh vegetables and flowers, I was further intrigued by the role they played in the rest of the neighborhood. As gardens in the city, I saw them as unique windows into the processes of growing and harvesting fresh food, a form of production that has largely been removed from urban life. Besides being a venue for these natural processes, I saw they were also showcases for the different gardening communities that made them as well, with each plot displaying a unique mixture of crops, planting techniques, and decorations. Compared to other elements of the urban public landscape, these gardens seemed to be incredibly alive and rich, both their plants and the people that grew them.

Beyond my interest in their contribution to the physical landscape of the city, the community gardens intrigued me because of my interest in the South End, itself – its history, more recent changes, and current issues. I knew something of the neighborhood's past, in particular the effects of Urban Renewal and the dramatic changes that had occurred both socially and physically in years since, and suspected the community gardens were somehow part of it. I also wondered about the role of the gardens in the South End today. The neighborhood was now known for being one that had gentrified yet was "still diverse." I thought back to the artist gardener's comment about the residents of the luxury condos gardening alongside long-time residents. I wondered what was going on in these shared open spaces, which, it seemed, were some of the few places that people of different backgrounds had reason to interact with each other.

Thus, my curiosity about community gardens in the South End came from the intersection of my interest in the gardens as a part of the physical landscape, and as a unique community place within the larger social dynamics of the neighborhood. What was going on amid these

green spaces punctuating city blocks, amid the carrots and tomato stalks and the beds of irises and day lilies? Why did the South End have so many of these gardens, and how had they come to be a permanent feature of this now upscale part of the city? What was their value both to the people who tended them, and to the larger neighborhood on the other side of the garden walls? My experience and intrigue eventually led to the following research questions that have guided the inquiry for this thesis:

- How did the community gardens in Boston’s South End evolve to become permanently protected open spaces?
- What is their present-day role for both gardeners and non-gardeners, and how has this role changed over time?
- And, what considerations must be given to developing and sustaining *new* community gardens as a permanent element of city design?

Answering these questions required investigating community gardens both as communities unto themselves and as a part of the larger physical design and social life of a neighborhood, within the particular context of the South End. Given the site-specific nature of this study, some aspects of the development of these community gardens are unique to the South End, and relevant literature is woven throughout the account accordingly. However, this thesis also informs a broader discussion of community gardens.

Overview of contemporary literature on community gardens

A review of the contemporary literature on community gardens reveals common themes, as well as gaps and areas for further contribution.¹ Community gardens have been researched most extensively for the benefits they provide their users, both tangible (those that produce measurable effects) and intangible (those whose effects demand a more qualitative evaluation). The tangible benefits of community gardens—such as economic benefit for gardeners, environmental benefit through increased biodiversity and storm-water retention, and neighborhood beautification—are well-documented in the literature. The intangible benefits of community gardens have also been the subject of previous research, including their social or civic-related aspects which are most relevant to the inquiry of this thesis.

¹ For a more detailed review of the contemporary literature on community gardens, see Appendix A.

Community gardens have been found to be spaces that can facilitate social gathering, interaction, and networking both within and outside of the garden space. The literature also suggests that the nature of the community gardening space may allow and promote interaction between groups that do not normally socialize elsewhere. However, this potential has rarely been the subject of empirical research. Therefore, the possible social benefits of community gardens in a wide range of community types, with particular attention to their ability to “bridge” gardeners from diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds, warrants further attention. Similarly, the conflict that may result from the interaction of different social groups, though briefly mentioned in the literature, remains largely unexplored. The South End, a neighborhood that has long been defined by its diversity and that continues to accommodate people from a range of races, ethnicities, classes, and lifestyles—many of whom garden—presents a promising setting in which to investigate such interaction.

Another contribution provided by a study of South End community gardens is to present research on the role and potential benefits of community gardens in gentrifying communities. Previous research on community gardens focuses primarily on the benefits for low- (or in some cases moderate-) income communities. However, the places where there is currently the most conflict over the preservation of community gardens are cities whose neighborhoods are experiencing the most gentrification. Because many see gardens as a temporary response to a social crisis, once the real estate values in a neighborhood begin to rise and demographics change, the gardens are viewed as no longer financially permissible and less of a social need. Though previous research suggests gardens may continue to play a valuable social role by promoting interaction between the increasingly disparate groups that are likely to exist in gentrifying neighborhoods, there is little primary evidence to support these suggestions. The South End is therefore an ideal testing ground to explore such possibilities.

Finally, researching the role of community gardens in today’s South End supplements the literature on the overall value of community gardens as open space resources. Previous research has found that community gardens are valued by gardeners and non-gardeners much like a park or other public green space. However, community gardens can hold a deeper meaning, largely because of their role as an open space created and managed by people from

the surrounding community. Because of the ever-changing nature of these open spaces, there is an on-going need for further investigation into the role community gardens may play in urban neighborhoods and city life. The South End, a community that has undergone tremendous change throughout the existence of its community gardens and continues to do so, is a ripe setting in which to undertake such a study. Thus, by investigating the benefits of and possible conflicts in community gardens in diverse neighborhoods and exploring the role of community gardens in a gentrifying neighborhood, and by furthering research on the overall value and meaning of community gardens as part of a larger public open space system, this thesis joins a larger inquiry into the character and potential of these unique spaces.

Research approach

As the mentioned previously, community gardens are both a place in and of themselves, with their own unique physical characteristics and social dynamics, and also a part of the larger urban landscape and surrounding community. Understanding the complete role and full value of these open spaces requires investigating community gardens comprehensively, from both sides of the garden walls. Therefore, this thesis investigates the evolution of community gardens in the South End from the perspective of both the community in the garden *and* the garden in the community. In doing so, it traces the development of an open space resource over three decades within the context of Boston's South End and assesses the unique value it holds for the neighborhood today.

The nested framework of the community in the garden in the community forms the structure for this thesis. In Part I, "The Garden in History," community gardens are placed within the larger history of public open space in the United States, and the specific history of community gardening is reviewed as well. Following this general account of the history of community gardens is the particular story of the development of community gardens in the South End. Part II, "The Community in the Garden," investigates these community gardens at the micro level through case studies of two of the South End's oldest gardens. These case study gardens are explored and analyzed as unique communities unto themselves but whose particular physical changes and social dynamics provide insight into dynamics of the larger

community surrounding them. By examining the development of these community gardens, the value they hold for their gardeners, and some of the tensions and conflict that takes place within the garden walls, the gardens are investigated as a reflection of the changes and issues in the larger South End neighborhood. The final section of the thesis, “The Garden in the Community,” steps back to examine community gardens overall as an element of neighborhood design and a source of public benefit in the South End. Through this nested analysis of the role of community gardens in the South End, we discover that although these spaces have been accepted as permanent features of neighborhoods and made official types of open space, they retain unique and dynamic qualities with the potential to enhance, engage, and enrich the unique communities within their garden walls as well as those around them.

Research methods

The research for this thesis addresses the role of community gardens in the South End at two scales. At one level, the thesis traces the overall development of a community garden movement in the South End. The other analyzes the development and present-day dynamics of two South End case study gardens. These two gardens were chosen out of sixteen community gardens that are either owned by or affiliated with the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust (SELROSLT). One, the Rutland Washington Streets Garden, is located in the southern section of the South End along a busy street. The other, the Worcester Street Community Garden is located in the northern section of the neighborhood along a quieter, residential street. These gardens were chosen based on a number of characteristics important to the success of this study. Both gardens are two of the oldest in the South End, with the Rutland Washington garden created in 1976 and the Worcester Street garden in 1980. This comparatively long tenure in the neighborhood enabled an investigation of both physical and social changes to the gardens over time. The relatively large size of the gardens and, therefore, high number of garden plots, were also two of the criteria for selection in order to access a larger population of gardeners for potential interviews. Finally, both gardens had garden coordinators who were willing to provide names and contact information of gardeners and facilitate communication with them for interviews. This is important both because membership lists for the gardens are not publicly

available, and also because it enabled the researcher to establish a better rapport with the informants and thus conduct more extensive and detailed interviews.

The research for this study employed a combination of interview, archival, and observational methods. In-depth interviews with twenty subjects were the primary source of data for the thesis. These subjects included gardeners, garden coordinators (those responsible for the day-to-day management of the individual gardens), garden leaders (those who have led larger community gardening and open space advocacy efforts), as well as other individuals affiliated with the development of the gardens in the South End. For each case study garden, garden coordinators were interviewed and also helped to facilitate communication with other gardeners. A total of six garden coordinators and gardeners were interviewed at the Rutland Washington garden, and seven at the Worcester Street garden. Of these, three were African-American, ten were white, three were openly gay, and two were residents of subsidized housing located near the community gardens. Three of the gardeners were in their thirties, four were between the ages of forty and fifty, four between sixty and seventy, and two were over eighty years old. All interviews with gardeners and garden coordinators were conducted in person at the subject's residence, the researcher's residence, or a local café, and lasted between forty-five minutes to one and a half hours. Interviews were audio tape recorded and subsequently transcribed to ensure accuracy in analysis. Interviewees were asked a series of standard questions and directed toward certain themes, but were largely allowed to determine the course of the conversation.² On a few occasions, follow-up interviews were conducted for further clarification and elaboration.

Additionally, a total of seven interviews with garden leaders or other individuals affiliated with the development of the South End's community gardens were conducted in a similar fashion, with the exception of two which were conducted by telephone. Of these informants, one was African-American, and six were white; five have led community gardening and advocacy efforts in the South End at some point over the last thirty years; one was a long-time resident of the South End who was indirectly involved through other efforts in the

² Interview questions are included in Appendix B.

community; and one is a part-time resident of the South End and gardener at one of its community gardens as well as a national expert on community gardens in general.

In addition to extensive interviewing, archival data including maps, memos, proposals, photographs, and reports were obtained from SELROSLT's offices and the Boston Urban Gardeners archives at the University of Massachusetts, Boston's Healy Library. Additional documents were also acquired from a number of gardeners' personal files. These data were used to trace both the overall development of community gardens in the South End and the individual histories of the case study gardens. During the course of the research, I also had the opportunity to observe two meetings for the Worcester Street garden during the course of this investigation, and data from these observations were also used in analysis.

A final observational method employed in this investigation of the South End's community gardens was the one with which the inquiry began – walking through the neighborhood and the gardens themselves. Though a relatively new form of open space, the community gardens of the South End are a part of a much larger and longer story, and one that can be read in their surrounding urban landscape, if the observer knows where to look. It is in this spirit that we commence our journey into the worlds of community gardens and their place within the larger universe of the South End.

PART I: The Garden in History

CHAPTER TWO

Urban Open Space and Community Gardens

The South End has long been revered by some for its architectural and urban character. Touted as the largest preserved Victorian neighborhood in the United States, the area is defined by its row houses whose brick bow-front facades define tree-lined streets, and send stoops down to meet the sidewalk. However, the neighborhood's physical design is not only remarkable for its buildings, but also its collection of open spaces. From its beginnings, the South End has been defined by its variety of green spaces, each referring to a different period of the neighborhood's development. Just as one may peel

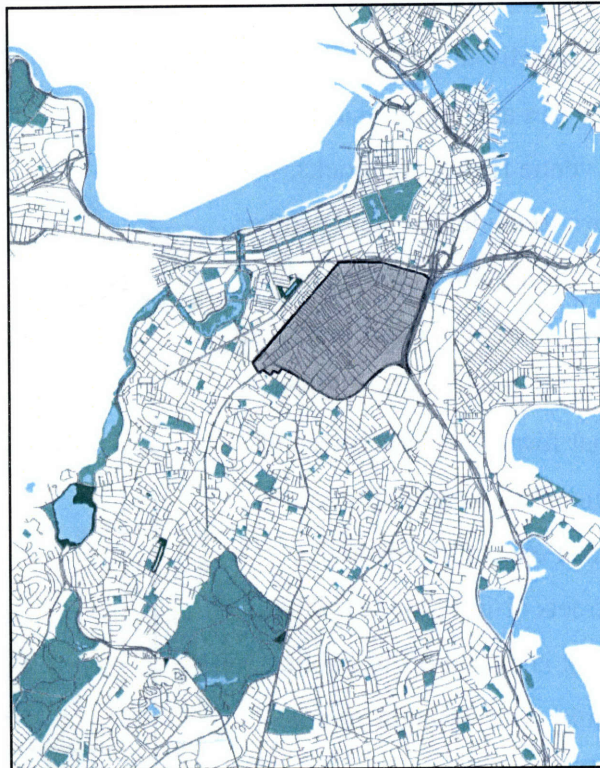


Figure 1: Boston's South End neighborhood.

back the layers of this architectural history, uncovering different eras of buildings and their accompanying styles, so may the keen observer uncover the layers of the neighborhood's open space history. With this objective in mind, continuing our walk through the South End provides an overview of different types of open spaces that have been developed throughout the United States over the past two centuries.

Walking along Washington Street near the center of the neighborhood, we come to the first, and what were for a time, the most formative open spaces in the South End: Blackstone and Franklin Squares (1 in Figure 2). The original plan for the South End, laid out in the 1850's, was organized around these large green parks, which were intended to be the centerpiece of

the surrounding upscale residential community. These squares and parks also appeared elsewhere in urban America as early types of formal open space, such as in William Penn's plan for Philadelphia,

Oglethorpe's Savannah, and the plan for Charleston, South Carolina.¹ Continuing

diagonally through the squares and along Shawmut Avenue for several blocks, we turn to the left to view another configuration of these early open spaces. Union Park is an oval-shaped swath of green that forms the centerpiece of

one of the neighborhood's most elegant residential streets (2 in Figure 2). The park is closed off to public entry with wrought-iron fencing and its primary benefit is the visual pleasure of its mature trees, well-kept lawn, and a fountain and flower bed as a center piece. Though Union Park is one of the largest and perhaps most well-known residential parks in the

South End, there are a handful of other green spaces—called either parks or squares—placed between rows of bow fronts along the neighborhood's side streets. Walking through Union

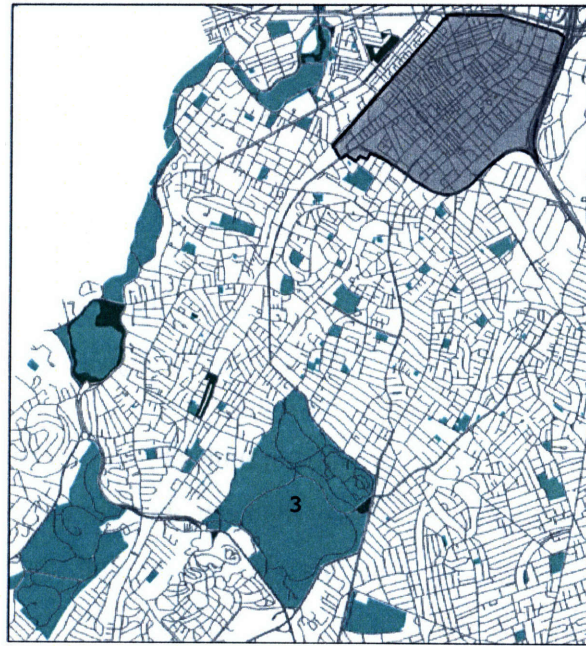


Figure 2: Open spaces in and around the South End

¹ Phyllis Andersen, "The City and the Garden" in *Keeping Eden: A History of Gardening in America*, ed. Walter T. Punch (Boston: Bullfinch Press, 1992), 148-151.

Park, the expanse of green space hushes the sounds of traffic passing along Tremont Street, and large trees create a green ceiling between the walls of row houses during summer months. The effect is like that of a lush, breezy outdoor room.

These early residential parks and squares were based on an English town planning mode and were used to create the framework for what was intended to be an upscale, residential district within easy reach of downtown Boston. Though neglected throughout much of the neighborhood's history, the early parks and squares have been restored by abutting residents over the past thirty years and now help to create some of the most desirable residential locations in the entire city.

Though those who planned the original layout of the South End had the good foresight to allot a certain amount of the grid to open space, the tendency for development in most cities and their neighborhoods was to do the opposite. The onset of intense industrialization and escalation of urban real estate values left little room for any substantial distribution of common and private green spaces in the city.² By the mid-1800's, lack of open space—especially open space designated for general use—was perceived as a pressing urban problem. There emerged a substantial constituency for the provision of public parks as a remedy to the ills of the crowded, dirty 19th century city, and thus commenced the most influential era of open space creation in United States history.

In 1851 the Legislature of the State of New York passed what came to be known as the First Park Act, making history as the first provision for public funds to be used for the development of public recreational open space,³ and giving parks a central role in the arena of land-use planning.⁴ Within this new era of park-making, no one was more influential than landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. Best known for the creation of New York's Central Park, Olmsted introduced a new aesthetic and rationale for public parks that would leave an indelible mark on the public landscape and establish a standard for park work that

² Ibid, 153.

³ Norman T. Newton, *Design on the Land* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 267.

⁴ Lisa Cashdan, Mark Francis, and Lunn Paxon, *Community Open Spaces* (Covelo, CA: Island Press, 1984), 2.

would not be improved or altered for years to come.⁵ Olmsted's influence spread quickly to dozens of U.S. cities,⁶ thus placing the development and management of open space within the sphere of public interest and realm of municipal responsibility. While the products of this era do not make an appearance in the landscape of the South End, they have been a formative element of the landscape of the Boston metropolitan area. Were we to leave the South End and travel just over two miles to the southwest, we could visit Franklin Park, a park designed by Olmsted and developed in the 1880's (3 in Figure 2). It is a prime example of the picturesque "country parks" designed during this era.

If we continued with our detour from the South End, we would encounter another example of the Olmsted park tradition – Boston's Emerald Necklace. Here, Olmsted departed further from the early era of open space where parks and squares were often isolated parcels within the urban grid. He instead conceived of linking a series large open spaces together with parkways into an urban open space *system*.⁷ Upon completion, this green corridor would stretch approximately seven miles, from Franklin Park to its endpoint in the downtown Public Gardens and Boston Common. This systems-based, large-scale approach to the protection and design of public parkland was continued in the work of Charles Eliot, apprentice to Olmsted, who went on to establish the Trustees of Reservations. As the first regional land trust in the nation, the Trustees of Reservations later gave way to the first metropolitan system of parks in the United States, the Metropolitan Park Commission.⁸ The Commission, which later created a Metropolitan Park District comprised of twelve cities and twenty-four towns in the Boston area, inspired other communities nation-wide to create similar coalitions and address open space issues on a metropolitan scale. Although some of these efforts incorporated smaller neighborhood parks or playgrounds, the focus was largely on the preservation of larger swaths and often scenic pieces of land, usually outside core urban areas.

⁵ Newton, 289.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 300.

⁸ Ibid, 318-323.

At this point in the official history of open space, far away were the smaller parks and green spaces of urban neighborhoods like the South End. Additionally, almost unimaginable was the idea that these large, metropolitan parks systems would one day incorporate community gardens. It would take almost a century more of developing the idea of open space before such a transformation was realized.

In the meantime, attention to open space provision gradually turned back toward spaces in the city. Accordingly, we return to the South End to resume our walk, this time in the far southern edge of the neighborhood, next to the Southeast Expressway. Now used as an athletic field, the Lester J. Rotch Playground was one of the early arrivals of the recreational movement that shaped open space development in American cities in the early 1900's (4 in Figure 2).⁹ While a dozen cities had playgrounds of sorts before 1900, these were often privately funded, and it was not until the turn of the century that cities such as New York and Boston authorized public funds for the development of playgrounds.¹⁰ Other cities also addressed recreational needs and established parks departments that assumed responsibility for the provision of a range of recreational spaces and activities.¹¹ While the onset of World War II slowed the pace of park development in many cities, there was by this time a solid pattern of large and small open spaces established in many cities throughout the United States.¹² While the South End was provided with relatively few of these recreational spaces, it did see the development of the O'Day Playground in 1940, located toward the center of the neighborhood (5 in Figure 2), which at the time was considered a model of contemporary playlot design and construction.¹³

The recreational parks and playgrounds movement of the first half of the 20th century was the last open space era before the South End, like many urban neighborhoods across the country, was hit by the devastating effects of post-war suburban flight and inner-city disinvestment.

⁹ Boston Urban Gardeners, Incorporated, *South End Open Space Needs Assessment* (Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1988), 14.

¹⁰ Newton, 622-624.

¹¹ Cashdan et al, 2.

¹² Newton, 631-637.

¹³ Boston Urban Gardeners, Incorporated, 14.

In the period of Urban Renewal that followed—beginning in 1965 and officially ending in 1979—two new parks were built. Walking one block northward from the Rotch Playground, we encounter Peter’s Park, a 3.2-acre open green space with a baseball diamond, tennis and basketball courts, and a dog yard (6 in Figure 2). The other public open space of this type is Ramsay Park, and is located at the western edge of the neighborhood.

Besides these traditionally constructed and managed open spaces, the Urban Renewal era also gave rise to a new type of—and indeed an entirely new approach to—urban open space. While the early 20th century parks and playground movement had done much to establish a substantial inventory of open spaces in many city neighborhoods, beginning the late 1960’s the increasing problems of officially-owned and operated open spaces coupled with the growing amount of vacant land incited some to re-evaluate how such spaces were developed and maintained. In 1965, for example, New York City appointed a new parks commissioner who initiated a broad program for developing “vest-pocket” parks on many of the small vacant parcels in of the city.¹⁴ Additionally, Philadelphia’s Neighborhood Park Program, established in 1961, allowed groups or individuals to lease city-owned land at no cost, spurring some block organizations to build parks. Unlike New York’s vest-pocket park program, Philadelphia’s operation—which was later expanded through private and public donations—required the participation of neighborhood groups in the planning, construction and maintenance of the facility.¹⁵ Thus, not only was there a move toward reclaiming some of the vacant land for smaller urban open spaces, equally important was the emphasis on community participation in its design, development, maintenance, and re-design. The shift from a top-down, bureaucratic approach to creating urban open space, to one based on experience, observation, and analysis of the neighborhoods and communities for which they were intended, was seen as desirable not only because it would simply provide badly-needed open space, but also because it would improve its quality and sustainability.¹⁶ This broad transition toward community-led urban open spaces—which would later be encapsulated in

¹⁴ Whitney North Seymour Jr., "An Introduction to Small Urban Spaces" in *Small Urban Spaces*, ed. Whitney North Seymour Jr. (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 5-6.

¹⁵ Eve Asner, "Philadelphia's Neighborhood Park Program" in *Small Urban Spaces*, ed. Whitney North Seymour Jr. (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 172-176.

¹⁶ Seymour, 9-10.

the term *community open space*—was the spirit with which Titus Sparrow Park was built. The one and a half acre park and playground has now opened up to our left (7 in Figure 2).

Originally intended for public housing that was to be built as part of the 1965 South End Urban Renewal Plan, the current site of Titus Sparrow Park sat as a vacant lot for years and during this time accommodated a variety of informal recreational activities. Then, in the early 1970's, a group of residents began to meet to plan the future of the lot. The design of the park today features the requests of the original group of residents, including a children's playground, a sloped open green for sledding, and basketball and tennis courts.¹⁷ Walking through, we also observe another requested use. Bordering one of the main paths and lining some of the park's edges are community gardening plots. Averaging about ten feet long by ten feet wide, these modest patches of earth display flowers, herbs, and even a few rows of vegetables. Somehow, along our route through the history and geography of the South End, urban community gardens had crossed paths with the neighborhood's parks, and had been incorporated into the system of the neighborhood's public open space system. Untangling how this marriage came to be requires looking into the past about one hundred years to trace the history of community gardening—an open space and land use with its own, yet often hidden, history—from its modest beginnings to the present day.

Community Gardening in the United States: 1890's – 1970's

Though rarely included in municipal public open space inventories, community gardens have a long been a part of the urban landscape in cities across the United States. Throughout their history, the level of public attention and support granted to community gardens has ebbed and flowed, largely in tandem with the social crisis they were intended to ameliorate.¹⁸ Thus, the history of community gardening emerges in a series of “waves,” each spurred by a set of pressing social and economic issues: depression, war, and pervasive urban disinvestment and decay. However, despite this cyclical nature of public attention and support, community

¹⁷ South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust, *The South End Garden Tour* (Boston: 2004), 38.

¹⁸ Laura J. Lawson, *City Bountiful: A Century of Community Gardening in America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 14.

gardening in the United States has been sustained by an almost continuous chain of efforts—albeit for different reasons—since its beginning in the early allotment gardens of the 1890's.¹⁹ A brief overview of the nature of each of these earlier efforts reveals the similarities and differences in their motivations and justifications, organizational and support structure, and physical form and location.

Early allotment gardens

The first community gardens in the United States trace their roots back to the English allotment garden, a feature of both rural and urban landscapes since the early 19th century. These gardens were first a product of private charity and later official social policy that intended to feed and control the urban poor.²⁰ Similar were the motivations that triggered the first communally tended gardens in the United States. Originally established at the onset of the depression of 1893-97 to provide relief to swelling numbers of needy city residents,²¹ the provision of urban gardens became a part of the overall Progressive agenda that characterized the period, appreciated by reformers as part of the solution to urban ills caused by congestion, immigration, environmental degradation, and economic instability.²²

These gardens were established in an era when only recently had it been deemed appropriate for land to be purchased and developed as open space with public funds, and when the ideal form and function for this open space was the carefully landscaped country park designed for passive recreation and relaxation. The use of land for the communal cultivation of crops by the general public, therefore, was not considered one that legitimized permanent public protection and support. Instead, early gardens were temporary uses established on vacant lots as acts of charity by public and private agencies and donors. In 1894, Mayor Pingree of Detroit instructed that vacant land be used for raising potatoes to feed the poor, a tactic which was soon emulated by a number of other cities. In Boston, a private charity called the

¹⁹ Ibid, 1.

²⁰ Sam Bass Warner Jr., *To Dwell is to Garden: A History of Boston's Community Gardens* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 10-12.

²¹ Ibid, 13.

²² Lawson, 21-22.

Industrial Aid Society established a Committee on the Cultivation of Vacant Lots in 1895, which established gardens for the poor to grow food.²³ In addition to these “charity gardens,” the period of 1890 to 1917 also saw the emergence of a volunteer-led movement that promoted home gardens, children’s gardens, and school gardens as a means of beautification and demonstration of civic-mindedness.²⁴ Thus, buoyed by a Progressive agenda of social reform and sustained by an increasing urban and largely immigrant population, community gardens quickly came to serve multiple agendas of charity, personal betterment, and community building, causes which would sustain the gardening movement until the next crises arrived – World Wars I and II, and the Great Depression.

Depression-era and wartime gardens

World Wars I & II and the Great Depression brought a new level of national attention not seen in the previous wave of gardening. However, despite the robust support at the onset of each pressing event, after the crisis died down, so did public attention to community gardens. The use of open space for cultivating crops, therefore, continued to be considered a temporary use for otherwise idle land.

The advent of WWI triggered federal promotion of municipally-organized war gardening campaigns. These gardens not only produced substantial quantities of food, they also elevated the status of gardener to patriotic citizen,²⁵ and generated a level of popular support for gardening unrealized by previous gardening efforts.²⁶ Where before community gardening had been relegated to vacant lots and school property, these wartime gardens were commonly established on swaths of plowed-under parkland.²⁷ The movement saw widespread support; community gardens were considered a more important land use than in the previous wave of gardening. However, while the campaign was strengthened by combining the efforts of municipal authorities, civic associations, other social groups, and even the

²³ Warner, 13-14.

²⁴ Lawson, 22.

²⁵ Warner, 17.

²⁶ Lawson, 113.

²⁷ Andersen, 160.

newly-formed parks departments, the increased reliance on a top-down, hierarchical structure did not allow for the cultivation of local leadership.²⁸ Without enabling the gardeners to organize and direct their gardens, the movement was unsustainable and, after the war, the land reverted to its former uses.²⁹

The onset of the Great Depression combined the practice of establishing charity gardens developed in the 1890's³⁰ with new levels of municipal, state, and national support.³¹ Later during WWII, previous gardening experience was summoned once again when a full-blown national campaign similar to that leveraged in WWI encouraged people to plant “victory gardens” to aid the war effort.³² Parks were again plowed under, and the gardens themselves incorporated elements of neighborhood parks, adding children’s play areas and barbeque pits.³³ Yet, the end of the war meant the end of broad-based support for gardening, and as with WWI, most of the second World War gardens soon disappeared.

However, the wartime gardening movement did not vanish completely. Instead it continued quietly in two directions: one went to rapidly expanding post-war suburbia, as former city-dwellers transferred much of their fervor for urban gardening into the new passion and prevalence of suburban gardens and lawns.³⁴ The other remained in the city, with several urban gardening efforts continuing throughout the 1950’s and ‘60’s, including neighborhood and school gardening programs and tenant gardening programs in public housing projects. The perseverance and development of these community gardening efforts, however modest, provided critical energy and experience—particularly in the local control and management of gardens—that would serve as a foundation for the new wave of gardens that emerged in the early 1970’s.³⁵

²⁸ Lawson, 114.

²⁹ Warner, 18.

³⁰ Warner, 18.

³¹ Lawson, 115.

³² Warner, 19.

³³ Andersen, 160.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Lawson, 207-211.

Community gardens of the 1970's

Although some of today's active urban community gardens in the United States were handed down from the wartime era (a prominent example being Boston's Fenway Garden, an original WWII victory garden), most arose out of a new process of community garden creation that began in the early 1970's. This new crop of gardens (and the gardeners who made them) were the product of a set social and political movements affecting many areas of American life, and—after two decades of suburban expansion, urban renewal, and center-city abandonment—a glut of vacant urban land.³⁶ In addition to increased grassroots political involvement and leadership, renewed interest in community gardening was also spurred by a confluence of several other factors, including the energy crisis of 1973 and subsequent spike in food prices, a new environmental awareness and ethic, and developments in environmental psychology which showed gardening to be a mentally restorative activity.³⁷ In short, people in urban neighborhoods—often a mix of African-American and white community leaders³⁸—empowered by and building upon the political activity of the Civil Rights era of the 1960's, began to conceive of the abandoned, litter-strewn lots peppering inner-city neighborhoods as assets rather than liabilities, and community gardening as the process that could enable such a transformation.

Whereas the creation and sustenance of community gardens in previous eras had depended on at least some if not complete charity or top-down intervention, the gardens of 1970's grew from the bottom up – they were created and managed by local initiative with little direction from municipal, state, or federal agencies. The typical process for establishing such gardens began with a group of interested community members seeking formal permission from the city or landowner to garden on the site before starting cleaning and cultivation. A yearly lease with a small annual payment (often one dollar) was usually set, granting some sort of official—though temporary—sanction for community gardening activity.³⁹

³⁶ Warner, 20.

³⁷ Lawson, 217.

³⁸ Warner, 20.

³⁹ Lawson, 220.

In some cities, these grassroots efforts grew into city-wide gardening coalitions or non-profit organizations. In Seattle, for example, efforts to preserve an abandoned truck farm as a community garden resulted in the city temporarily leasing land for its first community garden in 1971, which later evolved into its P-Patch Program.⁴⁰ In New York City, a group of garden activists called the Green Guerillas began taking over abandoned lots and turning them into gardens in 1972.⁴¹ And in Philadelphia, community gardening efforts on vacant lots attracted the attention of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, who in 1974 expanded its efforts to include community gardening and established an official gardening program, Philadelphia Green, in 1978.⁴² Boston too, saw a similar gardening coalition evolve with the formation of the Boston Urban Gardeners, or BUG, in 1976, the development of which will be explored in the following chapter.

Thus, the new wave of urban community gardening took root and spread quickly, and was soon a nation-wide movement. The impetus for this collective activity was not just for the purpose of clearing land for gardening in the city – it was about strengthening the fabric of the city itself. The community gardens of this era became vibrant symbols of neighborhood improvement and renewal, transforming inner-city disinvestment and abandonment into green and growing gardens tended by devoted individuals and organizations. They therefore came to be seen as a significant part of neighborhood revitalization efforts: they were a tangible, visible improvement in the appearance of the neighborhood and a catalyst for community involvement, with many people believing that those who took up gardening would become involved in other community activities and improvement projects.⁴³ The community gardens that emerged in this era were not just places to grow food – they were a feasible and fitting community development strategy for addressing the problems affecting resource-poor inner-city neighborhoods. It was from this vein that the community gardens of the South End would get their start.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 246.

⁴¹ Tom Fox, Ian Koeppel, and Susan Kellam, *Struggle for Space: The Greening of New York City, 1970-1985* (New York City: Neighborhood Open Space Coalition, 1985), 15.

⁴² Lawson, 254.

⁴³ Ibid, 219.

CHAPTER THREE

Community Gardens in the South End

While the development of the community gardens featured in this thesis share many characteristics in common with those emerging nation-wide in the 1970's, they are also the product of the place from which they grew: Boston's South End neighborhood. The following background lays a foundation for understanding both the emergence of the community gardening movement as a whole and the dynamics within the individual gardens.

The original pattern of the South End was laid out upon filled land. Its stately row houses and manicured parks and squares formed an upscale residential destination for Boston's well-to-do. Planning for the district began at the turn of the 19th century, and over the next sixty years the district was filled in and laid out in three major land-making efforts. However, the South End saw only a glimpse of its intended glory before the area—hit hard by the panic of 1873—took a turn from fashion, and by the turn of the century the area was known for its rooming houses, tenements, and their associated urban ills. However, in addition to its poverty, overcrowding, and transient population, the South End was also defined by the ethnic diversity of its residents and the agglomeration of charitable institutions that formed to serve and socialize them.¹

In the 20th century, things got worse for the South End. The Great Depression robbed the neighborhood of the much-needed jobs in the factories on the edges of the district. When WWII arrived, badly needed energies and resources were shifted elsewhere, and the neighborhood became destitute. When the war ended, national crises faded, and urban crises took their place. Mass flight to the rapidly expanding suburbs crippled cities throughout the country, and left the South End in 1960 with a population 40% less than in the preceding decade.² The federal response to this inner-city decline was Urban Renewal, and Boston, like cities everywhere, began to implement its plans. Between 1958 and 1960 the City

¹ Langley Keyes, Work in progress, 28 August 2005, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.

² Ibid.

demolished its West End neighborhood, and in 1959 slated South End for 100% clearance.³ Though considered a slum by many, the area at this time accommodated the majority of the City's single-room rentals, a substantial population of middle-class African-American homeowners, and a self-reported thirty-nine ethnic groups and nationalities. The neighborhood might have been demolished like the West End were it not for newly elected Mayor John Collins's decision to install former development administrator of New Haven, Ed Logue, as director of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) in 1961.⁴

Logue took a different approach to the redevelopment of America's faltering cities. Rather than moving forth with plans for clearance in the South End, he changed the redevelopment program to a mixture of residential rehabilitation, demolition, and new construction. Most importantly, he included sixteen neighborhood groups in the planning process. These efforts resulted in the 1965 South End Urban Renewal Plan, whose 616 acres comprised the largest urban renewal district in the country at the time. Although in theory the plan was more sensitive to the residents' wishes than 100% clearance, over time the mixed approach would prove destructive in its own right. Due to the unforeseen costs and delays of rehabilitating the dilapidated brownstone row houses, the City could not deliver the promised housing units at a cost that those who lived in them previously could afford. Low-income residents began to be priced out, and it became clear that without intervention existing South Enders would not be able to remain.

Before long a host of community-based groups, both well established and newly-formed, organized to battle over the choice of who would continue to live in the South End. The issue up for debate was subsidized housing, and the various groups took positions across the spectrum of favorable to opposed. Some advocated a moratorium on additional subsidized housing, some for no more housing for market-rate paying newcomers, and others positioned themselves somewhere in the middle.⁵ At the same time a rising residential real estate market exacerbated the growing divisions. Starting the mid-1960's, a wave of new residents began moving into the northern section of the South End and renovating its

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

deteriorated row houses.⁶ The newcomers first bought up the South End's rooming houses, and by the next decade new people had started to move into African-American parts of the neighborhood.⁷ As the decade wore on, the South End became increasingly divided along class and race lines.

The community gardening movement in the South End found its place amidst these plans and politics. The Urban Renewal Plan had not only created vacant land, but also fostered a network of community-based organizations which provided a reservoir of both human and material resources for the movement to draw on. Additionally, key actors who had learned from the Civil Rights movement provided another source of fuel for the creation of community gardens.⁸ By the mid-1970's these fundamentals were in place for the community gardening movement to build upon.

The South End community gardening movement

Before any grassroots gardening programs commenced, the City of Boston was looking to the creation of open space and gardens as a solution to the rather embarrassing problem of the many vacant lots that had resulted from Urban Renewal. In 1975 it established the Revival Program, which allocated half a million dollars during its first year to create twenty gardens on derelict parcels throughout the city.⁹ Of these, five were in the South End Lower Roxbury area.¹⁰ Shortly thereafter, the City established its Open Space Management Plan in 1976 which intended to deal with the problem of vacant land comprehensively by clearing and fencing empty lots, spreading cover treatments and herbicides to prevent weeds, and furnishing a layer of loam.¹¹ These City-run efforts, although well-resourced, were beset by problems of bureaucracy and top-down implementation. The Revival Program, despite its half million dollar budget, suffered from unreliable contractors who could not get gardens

⁶ *South End Neighborhood Profile, 1975* (Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1975).

⁷ *South End District Profile and Proposed Neighborhood Improvement Program, 1979-1981* (Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1979).

⁸ Sam Bass Warner Jr., *To Dwell is to Garden: A History of Boston's Community Gardens* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 26-27.

⁹ Judith Joan Wagner, "The Economic Development Potential of Urban Agriculture at the Community Scale" (Master's Thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1980), 28.

¹⁰ Lynne Potts, "Urban Gardens Blossom in South End Community," *The South End News*, 22 May 1982.

¹¹ Wagner, 37.

built on time, and some were so poorly constructed that they had to be redone.¹² When they were finally built, the community that was expected to cultivate them was not allowed to manage the gardens.¹³ Lots cleared by the Open Space Management Program, absent of any organizing effort to establish local stewardship of the space, often reverted to their former weed- and trash-strewn state.¹⁴

While the City was trying, rather unsuccessfully, to do something about its glut of vacant parcels, a grassroots gardening movement began taking root. Founded in the wake of the political activism of the 1960's and in the midst of the bitter fights over the changes that were occurring in the South End, the gardening movement came from several sources at once and rested upon a three-legged stool of strong political leadership, a cadre of committed neighborhood leaders, and the South End's strong network of neighborhood organizations. Over time, together they would help to solve the City's problem of vacant land by putting it to a community-affirming, and moreover, a community-*restoring* use.

The urge to garden came from several places at once. Leading the movement in the political arena was Melvin H. King, an African-American Massachusetts state representative. King had grown up in the South End's New York Streets neighborhood, which had been demolished in 1956 during the heyday of Boston's first round of Urban Renewal, which constituted clearance of several of its older neighborhoods. King was an activist in the South End for four decades. He was committed to the issue of local control of land and had been instrumental in the Tent City Movement of 1968.¹⁵ He saw local politics stalled by a lack of leadership and an intense distrust between communities and City officials. He also met residents with agrarian backgrounds who were eager to put the vacant land to use.¹⁶ In the early 1970's, King was asked by several Puerto Rican residents for permission to farm along the recently cleared swath of land that was intended for a four-lane bypass road passing through several Boston neighborhoods, including the South End and Lower Roxbury.

¹² Charlotte Kahn, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 15 February 2007; Jeff Sommer, "Urban gardening: The plots thicken," *The Boston Phoenix*, 4 October 1976.

¹³ Warner, 28.

¹⁴ Wagner, 22.

¹⁵ Warner, 28.

¹⁶ Melvin H. King, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 20 March 2007.

Shortly afterward, King was approached by his legislative aide, Judith Wagner, who had been engaged in a cleanup campaign for the trash-strewn vacant lots sprinkled throughout the South End. Shortly before visiting King, Wagner had observed a woman planting marigolds along the edge of one of the empty parcels. It was the only vacant lot for blocks that was free of trash. Excited at the prospect of having found a solution to the trash-strewn vacant parcels, Wagner went to King and suggested they promote community gardening on the empty lots.¹⁷ King's response to the suggestions for community gardens was to sponsor the Massachusetts Gardening and Farm Act, which passed in 1974 and granted gardeners and farmers use of vacant public land at no cost.¹⁸ This legislation successfully garnered some public support and removed some legal barriers to gardening in the city.¹⁹ However, it was not until King drew on existing community enthusiasm for gardening that community gardens would actually be built. Seeking support at the neighborhood level, he discovered more independent threads of gardening to weave into a whole.

One of the most instrumental garden leaders at the neighborhood level was Charlotte Kahn, a young white woman who had grown up on a African-American college campus and was dedicated to civil rights and racial equality. Kahn had moved to Lower Roxbury in 1974 and set up a garden on three combined yards in back of her Lower Roxbury residence. It immediately found favor with the neighborhood's children. Beyond the garden, the neighborhood life was being disrupted by Boston's first year of desegregation busing that transported African-American children in Lower Roxbury to school in South Boston. At the start of the following school year, Kahn decided to show her support and accompany the smaller children as they waited to board the bus for school in Charlestown. As she stood next to a vacant, trashed lot on Lower Roxbury's Tremont Street watching the children board the bus, Kahn remembered her garden and began to see it as a possible antidote to both the problem of the vacant lot and the racial hatred directed at the children. A garden would clean

¹⁷ Judith Joan Wagner, interview by author, Tape Recording, Boston, 22 March 2007.

¹⁸ Warner, 28.

¹⁹ Ibid.

and beautify a neglected space and create a haven for the children from the tumult in their outside world. The thing to do, it seemed, was to build more gardens.²⁰

Another key figure in the gardening movement was Augusta Bailey who had taught nutrition to poor families in her Roxbury neighborhood and fed children at a nearby housing project. She too supported the idea of giving poor people access to urban land to grow food.²¹ In 1976, Bailey held a conference on the inner city environment, and brought together Charlotte Kahn and Mel King, and also a host of other people with an interest in community improvement through community gardening: Morell Baber, a member of the South End Project Area Committee (SEPAC)²² and friend of Charlotte Kahn, Mark Anderson of the Salvation Army's Harbor Light Center in the South End,²³ and Bill McElwain, director of a small farm in Weston, Massachusetts that sold produce to urban residents and food co-ops at reduced rates.²⁴ Also in attendance were members of New York City's own gardening movement, the Green Guerillas.²⁵ Here, Boston gardeners and garden activists were not only connected with each other, but also got a glimpse of the larger urban gardening movement occurring throughout the country. The meeting inspired confidence in the idea of gardens in the city and left these individuals with increased enthusiasm to move forward and built them.

The South End Garden Project

Shortly after the conference in April 1976, King called a meeting in the South End for people in the neighborhood who were interested in building gardens.²⁶ Kahn, along with King's aides and other neighborhood representatives, went to work. Kahn brought attention to the problem of topsoil. Much of the soil on vacant lots in Boston was contaminated with lead, and therefore they would need to bring large quantities of clean fill to build gardens. Their nascent project was completely without funding to purchase such basic supplies, so King

²⁰ Charlotte Kahn, interview by author.

²¹ Warner, 28.

²² SEPAC was advisory body created by the Boston City Council that reviewed the Boston Redevelopment Authority's activities in the South End.

²³ Warner, 29.

²⁴ Sommer, "Urban gardening: The plots thicken."

²⁵ Charlotte Kahn, interview by author.

²⁶ "Proposal: South End Summer Open Space Program" Written for grant application by the staff of the South End Project Area Committee, 1976, Archives and Special Collections, Healy Library, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Boston.

managed to secure a donation of rich silt from the Metropolitan District Commission from a water filter in Marlboro, Massachusetts. Kahn, using a list of phone numbers provided by Judith Wagner, arranged for National Guardsmen to truck in the dirt.²⁷ The grassroots gardeners then appealed to the City for support which, embarrassed by the number of vacant lots in the area, was eager to help. They granted permission to use the BRA-owned sites Kahn had identified for gardening,²⁸ and staff at the BRA's South End branch cleared and fenced off the lots in time for the arrival of the topsoil.²⁹

On a weekend in mid-June of 1976, the National Guard convoy imported in 2,000 cubic yards of rich dirt from its suburban site twenty-five miles away.³⁰ The early garden leaders worked from dawn to far past dusk over what became known as an "earth-moving day." Kahn rode with the convoy and was responsible for seeing the dirt to its proper destination. Mark Anderson managed things on-site,³¹ and also served the guardsmen a spaghetti lunch, which he and his group at the Harbor Light Center had worked through the previous night preparing.³² When the convoys delivered their shipments, neighborhood residents, young and old, came out to spread the dirt.³³ Four gardens were created on this first earth-moving day.³⁴ Among these was the Lenox Kendall Garden, which had been the vacant lot where Charlotte Kahn stood watching the African-American children board the bus for Charlestown just a few months before.

Up to this point the gardening venture had operated without any funding, relying instead on a patchwork of donations from neighborhood agencies and organizations: United South End Settlements made a donation for the tools residents used to spread the first delivery of topsoil; the Salvation Army's Harbor Light Center made lunch and supervised the work; and

²⁷ Charlotte Kahn, interview by author.

²⁸ Jeff Sommer, "Luis Lopez and his garden of urban delights: Down on the South End farm," *The Boston Phoenix*, 31 September 1976.

²⁹ Charlotte Kahn, interview by author.

³⁰ "Proposal: South End Summer Open Space Program," Archives and Special Collections, Healy Library, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Boston.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Warner, 29.

³³ Charlotte Kahn, interview by author.

³⁴ Charlotte Kahn, interview by author; "Proposal: South End Summer Open Space Program," Archives and Special Collections, Healy Library, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Boston.

the BRA's South End branch approved the project, and fenced and cleared the lot. At about the same time of this first earth-moving day, however, the gardening group received its first grant from the State Manpower Services Council under the Massachusetts Local Initiative Program (MLIP). SEPAC sponsored the application, and, when the organization was awarded the grant, it combined the proposed gardening program with their cultural programs to create the MLIP-SEPAC Open Space Program.³⁵ With this grant they hired Mark Anderson as a full-time gardener, and hired an additional gardener and two other project carpenters. Later that summer they had another earth-moving day and created three more gardens. Instead of relying completely on the labor of neighborhood residents and volunteers to spread the soil and landscape these garden sites, the Open Space Program arranged for forty community youths employed through summer jobs programs sponsored by Action for Boston Community Development and the MDC to take on the work.³⁶

By the end of the summer, King, Kahn, and their cadre of volunteers, operating as the South End Garden Project under SEPAC's Open Space Project, had created seven community gardens on vacant lots. The next year they applied for another round of funding, and during the summer of 1977, held another round of earth-moving days and established three more gardens.³⁷ In doing so, they had changed the landscape of the South End and sown the seeds of what would become a new type of open space.

Thus, an urban community gardening movement in the South End began speedily and informally, bringing together and drawing strength from an array of motives and concerns. It was a way to provide space for nearby residents who wished to garden, many of whom were immigrants eager to get back to the land. It was for some a haven from the disruptions going on in local politics and neighborhood life. It was an opportunity for job-training and employment, and finally, a solution to the vacant lots that lingered as a bitter reminder of Urban Renewal. In a time when few believed a garden could exist in the city without

³⁵ "Proposal: South End Summer Open Space Program," Archives and Special Collections, Healy Library, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Boston; Sommer, "Luiz Lopez."

³⁶ "Proposal: South End Summer Open Space Program," Archives and Special Collections, Healy Library, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Boston.

³⁷ Charlotte Kahn, interview by author; Map, Prepared by staff of the South End Garden Project, 1976, Archives and Special Collections, Healy Library, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Boston.

becoming a magnet for crime and trash, in just two growing seasons the South End Garden Project (SEGP) had proven otherwise. Urban community gardening was not only possible, but it was also capable of generating tremendous support by encompassing a multi-faceted agenda for community improvement. Simply stated, community gardens *worked*. They were a quick, inexpensive way to address the neighborhood's vacant lots and were underpinned by diverse sources of support including local political leadership, adequate municipal support and tolerance, and a well-organized network of neighborhood groups. And, in the fertile soil of South End, they would provide something more than just a place to garden.

Community gardens as common ground

At the time that the SEGP emerged in the South End, community gardening was catching on elsewhere in cities such as New York, Philadelphia, Seattle, and other Boston neighborhoods. However, its role in the South End was particularly significant in light of the larger community dynamics that surrounded it. The battles over the provision of affordable housing continued and were amplified by the influx of newcomers who were perceived as making the area even less affordable. In addition to fractures along the lines of housing preferences and class, there was also a sense of division along racial and ethnic lines. Though the South End had long been known for its ethnic diversity, it was a diversity of proximity rather than relationships: ethnicities were tolerant of each other but remained largely isolated from other groups in daily life.³⁸ Furthermore, Urban Renewal had compounded this sense of estrangement by breaking up some of the neighborhood's stable minority communities when residents were relocated from deteriorated apartment buildings to new subsidized housing or displaced altogether.³⁹ In the decade following the initial jolt of Urban Renewal, many residents of the South End struggled to find footing in the ever-changing political and social landscape.

³⁸ Langley Keyes, personal communication, Boston, March 2007.

³⁹ "Proposal: South End Summer Open Space Program," Archives and Special Collections, Healy Library, University of Massachusetts, Boston, Boston.

Gardening presented a way for people to come together across some of these divides. It funneled the energy and enthusiasm of a population that at the time was geared toward gardening into a productive enterprise, and welcomed those without gardening experience to join them. The South End was a neighborhood whose predominant identity had been one of a diverse, harmonious, multi-ethnic community. When racial strife and class struggle started to break down this identity, gardens were a way to stitch it back together. Almost immediately, the gardens of the South End became a common ground that showcased the neighborhood's very best sense of self. In 1976, after just one growing season, Charlotte Kahn described what the gardens represented:

... many of [the gardeners] come from rural areas in the South, Puerto Rico, the other Caribbean islands, China, and the Middle East. They teach those of us from the city how to use the earth. There are 39 ethnic groups here – more than anywhere else in the city, maybe more than anywhere in the country. It's a pleasant, safe place, and it's still got diversity. We feel we're showing the rest of the city that you can have a multi-ethnic community that works.⁴⁰

Though in these early years most gardeners were low-income and their primary interest in gardening based on saving money by growing food, the gardens also accommodated the increasingly higher-income residents that were moving into the neighborhood and changing the social landscape of the South End as a whole. Said a woman in 1981 of her community garden on Washington Street which had a predominately African-American and Latino population when it began in 1976, “ ‘We have Hispanics and Lebanese, blacks, whites, Arabs, Ukrainians. We have gay people, families, singles, nuns, patients from Solomon Carter Fuller Mental Health – everybody.’ ”⁴¹ As the ideal of diversity persisted in the South End, the gardens were a way to put this ideal into practice.

The 1970's in the South End were a decade of both social and physical upheaval and transformation. Amid the tumult, the gardens provided a stable common ground upon which the different groups and interests could come together as a gardening community. With this firm footing in the South End soil, these gardening communities and the gardening movement continued to grow.

⁴⁰ Sommer, “Luis Lopez.”

⁴¹ Lynne Potts, "Urban Gardens Blossom in South End Community," *South End News*, 22 May 1982.

The Boston Urban Gardeners

While the South End Garden Project produced modest yet shining examples of community cohesion during a tumultuous time, the community gardening movement continued to develop, expanding its scope and sphere of influence far beyond the boundaries of the South End. The group leading the growth of the movement was the Boston Urban Gardeners, or BUG.

Soon after the formation of the South End Garden Project, several independent community gardening efforts taking place throughout the City of Boston came together to discuss their desire to improve and expand community gardening throughout the area in general. Two of these early members, John Ellertson and Edward Cooper, had built Revival gardens and were frustrated with the program's slow footedness.⁴² After an initial meeting with leaders of the South End Garden Project, the fledgling group grew to include an array of gardening, agricultural, and neighborhood groups. In addition to Cooper and Ellertson who had built and managed a garden in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood, representatives also came from the SEGP, garden groups in Jamaica Plain, Dorchester, and Brighton. Community-based organizations, including Action for Boston Community Development, also took part, and at the state level were representatives from the Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture. A new organization, BUG, incorporated in 1977, and in the first year found itself with a board of over forty members, testimony to the ability of community gardening to speak to a range of interest groups.⁴³ Responsibilities and available resources were determined at weekly meetings and the organization proceeded through substantial collaborative effort.⁴⁴ In the early years of the community gardening movement, BUG was a leading force, focusing on initiating, promoting, and supporting gardens in the South End, Dorchester, and Roxbury. However, even from these early days, it was clear that BUG's mission was about more than promoting gardening for gardening's sake. Rather, the group

⁴² Warner, 31.

⁴³ Charlotte Kahn, interview by author.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

sought to deal with a broad range of environmental and social issues in the inner city and beyond.

In the late 1970's and early 1980's BUG increased its capacity and began to expand its scope. The organization received a community development block grant and injected small amounts of money into thirty-eight individual gardens in need of improvement.⁴⁵ At around the same time, BUG also began to branch out programmatically, first establishing a job-training program with money from the Boston Department of Neighborhood Development in 1979, and then moving to focus on public housing gardens in the early 1980's, which eventually won them a contract with the Boston Housing Authority. By this time the group was functioning as a non-profit planning and design organization. They hired a full-time design staff person in 1984, and acquired contracts to do public housing gardens work in other states, authoring two manuals on creating gardens for public housing.⁴⁶ BUG's increasing ability to address a range of community and neighborhood planning and development issues through gardening and landscape design eventually led it to begin conducting neighborhood open space planning. It was in this capacity that BUG would play a leading role in the future of the South End gardens by successfully advocating for their inclusion on the City's official, permanent open space inventory. Before BUG found itself in a position to do this, however, the neighborhood would go through another round of changes.

The South End in the 1980's

At the start of the 1980's the South End continued to follow the course of the gentrification that the neighborhood had commenced upon over a decade before. Real estate values continued to rise, and from 1975 to 1985 there was a 17% annual gain in residential sales prices. A surge in the rate of condominium conversions, which jumped from just over one hundred conversions in the 1970's to 1,258 conversions between 1980 and 1985, added to the growth.⁴⁷ Accompanying the trend of increased ownership and restoration of the area's historic but dilapidated buildings was the 1983 designation of the South End as a Landmark

⁴⁵ Warner, 32.

⁴⁶ Charlotte Kahn, interview by author.

⁴⁷ Anne Hafrey, *Demographics and Housing in the South End, the City of Boston, and the Boston SMSA: A Profile* (Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, Research Department, 1985).

district by the Boston Landmarks Commission, the City's historic preservation agency. Many newer residents of the South End had come to the neighborhood with a desire to restore and protect its unique architecture. The Landmarks designation gave official sanction to this process by enforcing the rehabilitation of the area's 19th century row houses in a manner congruent with its appealing yet short-lived and distant Victorian past.⁴⁸ The influx of middle-class newcomers continued, squeezing more and more low-income families out of the private market and into the area's stock of subsidized housing. In 1985 a BRA neighborhood profile reported that the South End had come to be composed of two main populations – young, higher-income professionals and lower-income minorities. With both groups competing for the area's increasingly tight housing stock, the same report concluded, the South End was on the verge of an affordable housing crisis.⁴⁹ Affordable housing had been a hotly contested issue in the neighborhood since 1968. Since then, the issues had only grown more intense, with the real estate market adding tremendous value to the vacant parcels created by Urban Renewal. It was time to put these parcels to a higher and better use. Thus, by playing the affordable housing card, the Authority began preparing for another round of planning.

Community gardens as open space

The tight housing market in the South End and the tension between increasingly disparate classes that were struggling secure a foothold in this market put pressure on the City to develop the neighborhood's vacant parcels. However, there were other factors that precipitated the BRA's next move. First and foremost among them was Stephen Coyle, director of the BRA from 1984 to 1992. Coyle cast himself as a compassionate bureaucrat and made it his mission to assuage some of the anger the community felt towards the Authority. In late 1986, the BRA, led by Coyle, announced the South End Neighborhood Housing Initiative, or SENHI, a plan for disposing of seventy vacant sites in the South End that had been created by Urban Renewal over a decade before. The announcement of the new plan immediately revealed the deep divisions that still existed between new and old, rich

⁴⁸ The South End, "South End Landmark District Standards and Criteria," (Boston) <http://www.southend.org/tiki-index.php?page=South+End+Landmark+District+Standards+and+Criteria&highlight=landmakr%20district> (accessed 13 March 2007).

⁴⁹ Hafrey.

and poor, market-rate and subsidized that had disrupted the community throughout the 1970's. There emerged a passionate debate among numerous community groups with different agendas regarding how much affordable housing the vacant sites should provide.⁵⁰ Unlike the 1970's, however, this time community gardens, like the constituents for subsidized or market-rate housing, were also an interest group that would bargain for a share of the land, and bargain formidably at that.

In Phase I of SENHI, the BRA recommended most of community garden sites for new development, which drew immediate protest from the South End Garden Project. At that time the South End Garden Project was a non-profit organization that for ten years had overseen gardens and gardening in the neighborhood. Eleanor Strong, one of the middle-class white residents who came to the South End in the early 1970's, was president of the SEGP and a long-time advocate of gardening and gardener herself. Shortly after the initial unveiling of SENHI, Strong rallied a meeting of gardeners to assess their strategy, and began circulating petitions to the BRA calling for the preservation of all existing garden sites.⁵¹ The gardeners' anxiety was exacerbated by the BRA's designation of a garden on the edge of Bay Village and Chinatown for the development of low-income housing. The impending loss of a garden, coupled with plans to develop the remaining vacant land the South End, drove home the realization that the community gardens were unprotected and—as in previous waves of community gardening—were considered by many to be temporary uses of land. Suddenly, the gardeners had their “wake up call.”⁵² They began to organize to get in on the SENHI action before it was too late.

When the garden groups went to the bargaining table, however, it was not to argue for gardens or gardeners per se, but for the preservation of open space in a community that had been repeatedly denied its fair share. Early in the SENHI process, Charlotte Kahn, then executive director of BUG, began to advance a case for a master plan for undeveloped land in the South End that considered open space needs alongside those of housing. Kahn had accumulated an arsenal of research on the South End's deficiency of open space and the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ J.G. Stalvey, "Gardeners organize to save open space," *South End News*, 31 July 1986.

⁵² Betsy Johnson, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 8 December 2007.

City's failure to make good on its promises to provide more of it throughout the Urban Renewal period. As SENHI moved forward, Kahn, Strong, and other garden advocates began to implore the City to recognize the favor it had been dealt through the community gardens – the preservation and maintenance of badly needed open space. Eleanor Strong, in a letter in the *South End News* published shortly after the initial garden-organizing meeting wrote:

Gardeners in the South End and Lower Roxbury have been improving and developing neighborhood open space for 10 years now. Every garden, no matter when it got started, improved a vacant lot that was once an eyesore, covered with weeds and rubbish, and at a time when nobody wanted it. We've invested, time, energy and money in our gardens to develop them as neighborhood recreational open space.⁵³

Taking the gardens, they argued, would diminish the already insufficient amount of open space available for South End residents and in doing so make the City look even worse. Preserving them was a chance for the City to make good on its promises, enhance its reputation in the neighborhood, and could be done without substantially impacting the supply of land available for developing housing.⁵⁴ In addition to the argument for gardens as open space, residents of the community gardens advocated for community gardens because of the unique role they played in neighborhood life. As had been articulated nearly ten years before, the gardens provided common ground for in the midst of the diverse and ever-changing—and to some, continually fragmented—social landscape of the South End. James Cooper, a resident who lived near the Worcester Street garden, in a 1986 letter to Coyle urging the protection of the gardens, wrote:

I have lived in the neighborhood since 1975 and have seen the rapid change in demographics. Where there once was a very strong community feeling about the South End and the Claremont Neighborhood in particular, that feeling is slowly slipping away. There are precious few community activities which bring people in the neighborhood together and let them get to know each other. The Worcester Street Gardens is one activity in which whites and blacks, young and old work together. The continued use of the garden makes the city liveable and enjoyable.⁵⁵

⁵³ "Save community gardens," *South End News*, 28 August 1986.

⁵⁴ J.G. Stalvey, "The open question: housing or open space?" *South End News*, 21 April 1988.

⁵⁵ James S. Cooper to Steven Coyle, 20 October 1986, Archives of the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust, Boston.

The community gardens, therefore, were both badly-needed open spaces and community unifiers which, in a neighborhood that valued its diversity but struggled to put it into practice, were particularly valuable. For these reasons the gardens were certainly worthy of the same protections given to other officially-recognized open spaces.

As the SENHI process moved forward, the garden in Bay Village, despite days of protest and picketing, was bulldozed, and the garden leaders' resolve to save the remaining gardens strengthened.⁵⁶ Within the SENHI process the community gardening constituency (represented by the South End Garden Project) joined forces with the Ad Hoc Housing Coalition, an alliance of neighborhood organizations who argued for a balanced supply of low-income, moderate-income, and market rate housing, as well as land for open space.⁵⁷ When Coyle announced the outcome of the SENHI process in early 1987, it was based on this mixed-income vision. The new housing would consist of 1/3 low-, 1/3 moderate-income, and 1/3 market rate units, a decision that gave the South End the highest level of low and moderate income housing in Boston.⁵⁸ At this point there were no provisions made for open space. However, Kahn had been persistently urging Coyle to recognize the value of the gardens and grant them protection on par with that accorded to other municipal open spaces.⁵⁹ Eventually, Kahn's tenacity paid off. Shortly, after the SENHI Phase I was decided, Coyle announced that BUG had been awarded a contract to conduct a three-month open space study of the South End. Garden advocates, operating under the umbrella of open space, would be allowed to make their case. Coyle also pledged that development slated for two community gardens under SENHI Phase I would be postponed until the study was completed.⁶⁰

BUG's agenda fit conveniently with the City's at the time and was bolstered by a larger call for increases and improvements to Boston's open space system. In 1987 Mayor Flynn

⁵⁶ Joe Battenfield, "Gardeners dig in vs. bulldozers," *The Boston Herald*, 3 November 1986.

⁵⁷ Rachel Dowty. David J. Hess, "Case Studies of Community Gardens: Boston Community Gardens," eds. David J. Hess and Betsy Johnson 2005, 2, <http://www.davidjhess.org/BostonCG.pdf> (accessed 9 December 2006); Betsy Johnson, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 28 March 2007.

⁵⁸ Langley Keyes, Work in progress.

⁵⁹ Charlotte Kahn, interview by author.

⁶⁰ "Wide open spaces: BRA postpones development of two community garden sites," *The South End News*, 5 March 1987.

announced that his administration was devising the first comprehensive open space plan for the City had undertaken in over a century. The mayor also intended to propose an open space zoning designation that would allow neighborhood councils, advisory committees and the Boston Conservation Commission to request certain sites be zoned as open space.⁶¹ Later that year, a group of city and state officials and leaders of environmental groups, business and neighborhood organizations contributed to *The Greening of Boston*, a report that advocated for parks, gardens, and other open spaces as a fundamental element of a high quality of life in urban areas, particularly for low-income residents. The report also advocated for recognition of the importance of community gardens in the social fabric of the city.⁶² Gardens had grown from a temporary use of land to a legitimate type of open space, and one recognized not only for its physical benefits but role in community life as well.

In early 1988, BUG completed *The South End Open Space Needs Assessment*, and presented its recommendations to the BRA and South End residents. Its basic argument was as follows: the BRA had repeatedly downscaled the South End's allotment of open space throughout the implementation of the Urban Renewal plan and had paid scant attention to the environmental consequences of these broken promises.⁶³ In the meantime, neighborhood residents had invested time and money creating for themselves what the City would not: a collection of highly valued neighborhood open spaces. Therefore, the very least the city could do as they prepared to develop the last remaining vacant parcels was to preserve the eight existing community gardens. In addition, they also recommended the City preserve four additional parcels for open space, for a total of twelve parcels. Two of these parcels had been developed by nearby residents as community pocket parks, and two were vacant parcels. These twelve parcels accounted for almost one quarter of the South End's developable City-owned land.

BUG's argument worked: they demonstrated that gardens, as open space, were both a positive contributions to the neighborhood's physical fabric, and also emphasized their social

⁶¹ Michael K. Frisby, "Flynn readying plan to protect open space," *The Boston Globe*, 13 May 1987.

⁶² David Arnold, "Parks, space seen as key to Boston's well-being," *The Boston Globe*, 30 November 1987.

⁶³ Boston Urban Gardeners, Incorporated, *South End Open Space Needs Assessment* (Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1988), 19.

benefits. Their land use agenda fit conveniently with the political agenda of the BRA. Coyle wanted to create an image for himself as the neighborhood hero during SENHI that Logue had not during the Urban Renewal. He realized that, in addition to providing subsidized housing, preserving open space was a way to achieve this. The argument was presented during a unique moment in time when interests and opportunity for both neighborhood groups and the City converged. Coyle seized the moment. Shortly after BUG presented its report, the BRA announced their support for the proposal in full.⁶⁴ With their well-crafted argument and recommendations for community gardens open space, the gardeners and the rest of the South End went on to settle SENHI Phase II.

The South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust

While Phase I of SENHI had emphasized housing and a parcel-by-parcel method to disposition, Phase II took a more comprehensive approach and addressed a range of the community's land use needs. While the BRA, with Coyle as its spokesman, embraced the idea of preserving the designated parcels for open space, the actual decision to do so was stalled by the technicalities of splitting the garden parcels off from other BRA land that would be used for housing.⁶⁵ At this time, the Trust for Public Land (or TPL, a national land conservation organization with offices in the Boston area) began negotiations with the BRA to dispose of the open space parcels through the creation of a land trust. In June of 1989 the BRA agreed to give temporary designation to eight of the original twelve parcels to TPL as holding entity until a new organization to manage the parcels could be formed.⁶⁶

TPL worked with Eleanor Strong at the South End Garden Project to create a new gardening organization to operate the land trust. However, the eventually decided to fold the SEGP into the new land trust in order to maintain the trust and alliances the Garden Project had built with other gardens and gardeners throughout the South End over the years.⁶⁷ In 1990 the SEGP became the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust (SELROSLT), and, after some organizational restructuring, SELROSLT gained title to the eight parcels, five of

⁶⁴ Stalvey, "The open question: housing or open space?"

⁶⁵ "Urban preserves," *The Boston Sunday Globe*, 25 September 1988.

⁶⁶ Steve LeBlanc, "Fertile ground for planting: City expected to grant permanent status to local community gardens next week," *South End News*, 12 April 1990.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

which were existing community gardens, and three which were empty lots or informally used open space (Figure 3). The gardens were now official, protected, community open spaces.



Figure 3: First eight parcels transferred to SELROSLT

The story of the creation and preservation of these community gardens is in some respects the product of a set of independent threads whose confluence mark rare moments in history. The gardens emerged from the connection of local political leadership and neighborhood organizations that held in common a vision to transform the glut of vacant land that blighted the neighborhood into a source of inexpensive food and natural beauty. Underpinning these efforts was an enthusiastic, largely immigrant population, who eagerly seized upon their proposed solution – community gardens. Over time, it became evident that the gardens were not only for residents in need of inexpensive food and with agricultural backgrounds, but also for gardeners of a variety of backgrounds and skill levels. By accommodating the

increasingly diverse population of South End residents within these garden communities, the neighborhood's ideal of diversity became, within the garden walls, a reality.

Once established, the gardens continued to thrive. However, they did not receive permanent protection as open space until another rare moment where a set of intersecting interests realized their preservation was at once good policy and good politics for both the City and the neighborhood. City politicians were touting the benefits of open space. Gardeners argued for the preservation of the community gardens as a way to provide more of this open space to the South End neighborhood. And Steve Coyle at the BRA, who was determined to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome for the future development of the neighborhood's remaining vacant land, eventually became convinced that providing open space through preservation of the gardens was a critical element to achieving such a win-win solution. Thus, the majority of the neighborhood's gardens were transferred to the newly formed South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust and declared a permanent, official open space

Though the changes that the gardens have undergone overall are considerable, critical aspects of these community gardens remain remarkably similar to when they first began. They still provide an opportunity for low-income residents to help themselves by growing food. They still provide much-needed open space in a dense urban neighborhood that would have otherwise gone without. And they still allow people of different backgrounds to come together in a way they otherwise would not, making the most of the South End's racial, economic, and lifestyle diversity.

PART TWO

The Community in the Garden

The gardens that were built in Boston's South End neighborhood throughout the 1970's and into the 1980's emerged from a similar set of conditions: free available vacant land, neighborhood organization and leadership, political activism, and enthusiastic gardeners. In addition to these common characteristics, each garden also cultivated a distinct trajectory and history of its own. Though organizations such as the South End Garden Project and the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust provided and continue to provide some management over the neighborhood's community gardens, they were and are largely self-regulating entities. Because the different gardens were built and maintained by different groups of gardeners—garden *communities*—each developed a set of unique characteristics, both in form and function. They took on lives of their own, behaving, as one gardener told me, like living organisms and as communities unto themselves.¹

Along these lines, Professor and Landscape Architect Anne Whiston Spirn suggests that community gardens are microcosms of larger communities.² Because the South End community gardens tend to draw from the areas that surround them, the community *in* the garden reflects the community *around* the garden, and as the latter changes so will the former. Or, as one gardener stated, the garden is “a community of people, so as the community changes there'll be parallel changes in who comes to garden.”³ If, as Spirn proposes, the study of community gardens holds lessons for the understanding and designing of the larger neighborhoods and cities in which we live, then examining the communities in the gardens of the South End can provide valuable lessons for understanding the dynamics of this larger area. Part Two of this thesis undertakes such an investigation through case studies of two South End gardens and the communities within them.

¹ Anonymous phone interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 24 Feb 2007.

² Anne Whiston Spirn and Michele Pollio, *This Garden is a Town*, The West Philadelphia Landscape Plan (Philadelphia: Graduate School of Fine Arts, Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, University of Pennsylvania, 1990), 7.

³ Stan Scarloff, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 2 February 2007.

CHAPTER FOUR

Developing the Garden: Introduction to the Case Studies

The Rutland Washington Streets Community Garden

Located at the corner of Rutland and Washington Streets, the site of this community garden was originally occupied by five brownstone row houses and some smaller outbuildings set amid a neighborhood of rooming houses.⁴ The parcels upon which these buildings stood were marked as “Property acquired for clearance and redevelopment” in the South End Urban Renewal Plan of 1965.⁵ The first part of this prescription—clearance—took place sometime in the late sixties. However, when it became apparent that rents in other newly constructed housing developments were too high for existing residents to afford, the South End Project Area Committee (SEPAC) launched a series of protests against the BRA. They succeeded in stalling the project, but in the interim federal funds for housing dried up and the BRA’s plans were abandoned.⁶ Thus, redevelopment never happened, and the property sat idle for several years until it was selected to become a garden.

In the summer 1976 the site was chosen by Mel King and Charlotte Kahn to be developed as part of South End Garden Project’s first round of garden-making. At the Rutland Washington site, the earth-moving convoy deposited its truckloads of dirt directly into the fenced lot, forming great mounds that looked like “waves” and the emerging garden a “sea”.⁷ With no machinery for spreading the soil, it was unclear how it could ever be evenly distributed across the garden. However, neighborhood children rose to the challenge, taking up hand tools and getting to work. By that evening, the neighborhood residents had smoothed over the “waves” and made the “sea” less choppy,⁸ and the ground stood prepared for what would become the Rutland Washington Community Garden.

⁴ Sanborn Map Company, and Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, Reference and Bibliography Section, *Sanborn fire insurance maps, Massachusetts, 1867-1950*, microform, (Teaneck, N.J.: Chadwyck-Healey, 1983).

⁵ Boston Redevelopment Authority, *South End Urban Renewal Plan*. (Boston: Boston Redevelopment Authority, 1965).

⁶ Jeff Sommer, "Luis Lopez and His Garden of Urban Delights: Down on the South End Farm," *The Boston Phoenix*, 31 September 1976.

⁷ Charlotte Kahn, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 15 February 2007.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Little is known about how the Rutland Washington's configuration was determined when the garden was developed in 1976. The gardeners at the time laid out the railroad ties according to no strict plan, and these boundaries still delineate the plots today, as shown in Figure 4. Present-day gardeners suggest they were allocated according to need. One of the garden organizers for Rutland Washington explained:

When you look at the Rutland Washington, it's an organic space, it wasn't really laid out. A bunch of families just took railroad ties, and you'll see there's a great deal of irregularity in the size. At the time if you had a big family, they had a big space because they grew corn, and you need a big space to grow corn."⁹

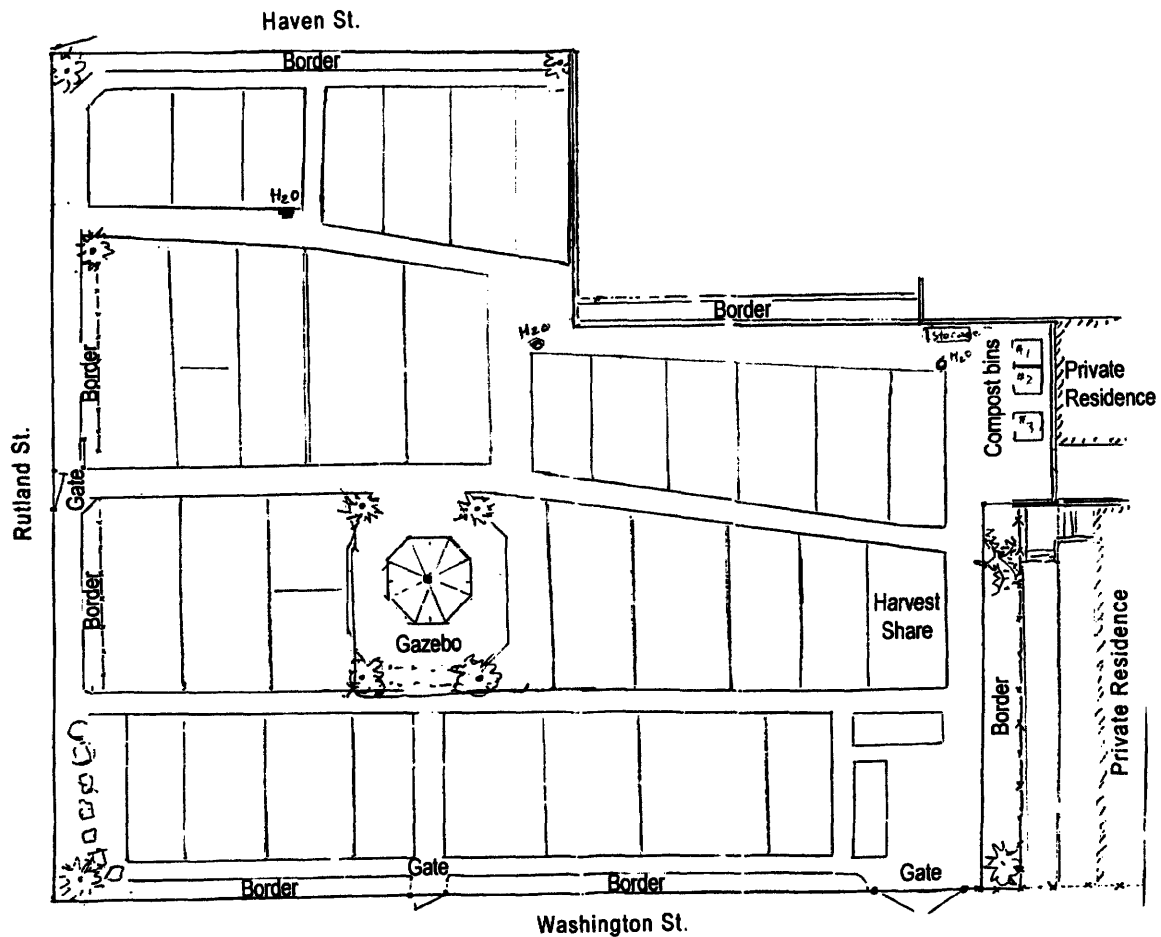


Figure 4: Plan of the Rutland Washington Community Garden.

⁹ Rob Cleary, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 25 January 2007.

Maximizing the amount of space available to grow food drove the garden's design in the early years. Initially, there was no pathway along the edges of the garden and the plots extended all the way to the garden's fence. Additionally, the space now occupied by the gazebo was used as a plot before 1984.

Soon after the garden was laid out, gardeners put up a cabaña—a simple, tent-like structure for shelter and shade—in the corner of the garden where the compost bins currently sit and where previously stood several large ailanthus trees. The cabaña was a multi-purpose space, and though situated in the corner of the garden, it was the center of garden life. Early gardeners remember Maria, an elderly Hispanic woman who sat under the cabaña most summer days, and kept her eye on the children who would play in the garden. Gardeners would bring chairs to sit in the shade, keeping a radio playing Latin music, and often cooking out in a barbeque pit. The cabaña was also the location for the annual fall pig roast that doubled as the garden's business meeting. Gardeners kept their tools stashed in this corner as well. Early gardeners remember the garden as a place that welcomed mostly everyone, including neighborhood children, and homeless people who would come in to sit in the shade.¹⁰ In the early 1990's, the small, curving stone pathway in the southwestern corner of the garden was added in memory of Maria.

Because initially the Rutland Washington's plots extended all the way to the fence, the garden did not have an established border along its edge. Over time, however, one emerged. Gardeners, tilling the soil above the demolished buildings, would constantly turn up rubble in their plots and throw it towards the fence along Washington Street. Over time, this rubble heap grew and sprouted weeds. Eleanor Strong—a gardener during these early years who later became president of the South End Garden Project and is now garden organizer at Rutland Washington—thought they could improve this ragged edge by pulling up some of the weeds and planting flowers there instead. A recent in-migrant from the suburbs, Strong still had connections to her gardening friends in Harvard, Massachusetts, and arranged for a donation of irises and daylilies from their gardening club's annual plant sale. The perennials

¹⁰ Anonymous interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 22 January 2007.

from Harvard were planted in the border of the Rutland Washington garden in the South End, and the garden had its first decorative border.

At first, the Rutland Washington garden was bound by a chain-link fence with only one gateway on Rutland Street. While this fence may have been repaired or partially replaced, there was no major upgrade until the garden joined the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust (SELROSLT) in 1990. The Rutland Washington garden received its new fencing shortly afterwards, the design of which was adapted from the fencing used along the railroad corridor that is now the Southwest Corridor Park. A second gateway to the garden was also added at this time along Washington Street.



Figure 5: Steel-picket fencing was installed at the Rutland Washington garden in the early 1990's.

After the steel-picket fencing was installed in the early nineties, the borders along the garden were widened and planted with new shrubs, bushes and flowers (Figure 5). Today, different sections of the border are maintained by different gardeners and reflect their different tastes and preferences.

There are currently thirty-five garden plots and two raised beds in the Rutland Washington garden. One of the plots next to the gazebo is a common plot where gardeners cultivate strawberries and herbs to share with visitors to the garden. Another plot is designated as a “harvest share” and is used to grow food that is donated to local food pantries.

Like the garden itself, the area surrounding Rutland Washington has also changed considerably over the past three decades. The vacant lots along Washington Street have gradually been filled in with new commercial and residential development. Offices, cafes, restaurants, and the nearby Boston’s University Medical Campus have made Washington

Street a popular area for many South End residents. Also nearby is the Franklin Square House, which provides subsidized housing to elderly residents, and next to the Rutland Washington garden across Haven Street is another, smaller community garden called Rutland's Haven. Although the two gardens share some history, today they are separate gardens with distinct garden communities.

The Worcester Street Community Garden

The Worcester Street garden emerged not from the efforts of the South End Garden Project but from its own unique sequence of events. Carriage houses first occupied the garden site, but these later were converted to other uses, and by the mid-1960's the area was comprised small businesses and light industry. The row of buildings that had occupied the site was slated for acquisition for public facilities in the Urban Renewal Plan and cleared sometime in the early 1970's.¹¹ Construction of what was intended to be subsidized housing commenced according to the plan, but ground to a halt when, according to local sources, the would-be developer realized the project to be financially unfeasible and abandoned the work.¹² The building stood half-finished and boarded up for seven years until 1979 when the Department of Urban Housing and Development (HUD) at last tore the structure down. The BRA had no plans for the property, so the neighborhood was left with a rubble-strewn vacant lot. With its old foundations backfilled with the wreckage of the recently demolished structure, and the site was a grim reminder of the failed Renewal Plan. However, the neighborhood was home to the Claremont Neighborhood Association, one of the oldest organizations of its kind in Boston, which moved in to spur action shortly after the lot was cleared.

In the winter of 1980, the Claremont Neighborhood Association provided a forum for neighborhood residents to discuss ideas for the vacant lot.¹³ Cynthia Wilson and Joyce Delorentis, two white, middle-class South Enders who were active in the neighborhood association, came up with the idea of putting a community garden on the empty site. Wilson

¹¹ Boston Redevelopment Authority, *South End Urban Renewal Plan*.

¹² Barbara Hoffman, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 13 February 2007; Cynthia Gorton, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 5 March 2007.

¹³ Worcester Street Community Gardens Association, Inc., "A Neighborhood Garden in the South End of Boston," 15 August 1984, Submitted to the Community Garden Award Committee at the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, Archives of the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust, Boston.

recalled seeing other community gardens in the area. However, the real impetus to establish a community garden came from her personal gardening experiences in both her childhood and later years improving the front and back yard of her home on Claremont Park in the South End. Eager to begin their gardening endeavor, the two women dropped flyers through every mail slot within a ten-block area.¹⁴ “Are you a Gardener?” the flyer read, “Community gardens are starting in you neighborhood. For information on Spring planting, and to get on a list for available plots, call now ...”¹⁵ Wilson received 150 phone calls within four days. With apparent support, a group of neighborhood residents went to work in early spring to organize the new garden. The president of the Neighborhood Association made phone calls to the BRA and HUD to determine who had ownership of the site and the procedure for getting permission to garden there. Other residents collected signatures for a petition to bring to negotiations with the BRA. The Authority approved the use of the site for gardening, and provided further support by removing the remaining rubble from the lot and supplying the first layer of topsoil. By May, 1980, the Worcester Street Community Garden was ready for its first growing season.

The 10' x 10' plots for the Worcester Street garden were staked on in mid-May over what was described as an “absolutely hysterical day” with “a group of people, none of whom was a surveyor, trying to lay out garden plots.”¹⁶ Like many community gardens, this basic framework was made with found materials and volunteer labor. Barbara Hoffman, one of the original gardeners and who came to the South End in 1967, led the effort to find the building blocks for the garden. First, she inquired about some railroad ties she noticed piled next to the recently-dismantled tracks that ran over what was intended to be the Southwest Expressway and what is now the Southwest Corridor Park. The ties were free for the taking, and so Hoffman arranged for several Jamaican gardeners with a pickup truck to bring them to the garden. One by one, plots were defined. At around the same time, a renovation on the Boston Common (an park downtown, dating back the colonial era) had produced a huge pile of granite cobblestones, which, like the railroad ties, caught Hoffman’s eye. Before long, the Jamaicans brought them to the garden as well and, with sand harvested from various street

¹⁴ Cynthia Gorton, interview by author.

¹⁵ Cynthia Gorton, Garden flyer, March 1980, Cynthia Gorton, Personal files, Boston.

¹⁶ Barbara Hoffman, interview by author.

construction sites in the area, used them to create part of the path at the gateway the garden.¹⁷ Some of these stones were also used to create the borders for individual plots where no railroad ties were available. These materials, though weathered, continue to maintain the boundaries of the plots and paths in the garden today.

Shortly after laying out the plots, gardeners dug and planted a boarder with donated bushes and trees.¹⁸ Like the Rutland Washington Garden, this common infrastructure is generally the joint responsibility of several gardeners who volunteer to maintain the space. While this border distinguished the garden from the rest of the neighborhood, for quite some time the garden went without a fence, and stealing was a serious problem.¹⁹ The absence of a secure boundary between garden and neighborhood caused gardeners to erect individual fences around their plots (Figure 6). Eventually, in the late 1980's the garden was finally enclosed with a vinyl-clad chain-link fence, and in 1995 SELROSLT installed steel-picket fencing and granite columns to mark the garden's perimeter and main gateway.



Figure 6: Individual fences at the Worcester Street garden, 1980.

Like securing a fence for the garden, obtaining a reliable water source demanded both individual and collective resourcefulness. In the beginning, gardeners acquired water however they could and from whoever would help them. Various sources reported that gardeners hooked up to the exterior faucet of the Frederick Douglass House, relied on an

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Worcester Street Community Gardens Association, Inc., "A Neighborhood Garden in the South End of Boston."

¹⁹ Barbara Hoffman, interview by author.

abutting gardener's hose, and when necessary, carried water in using containers.²⁰ Before long, however, they settled on the fire hydrant on the opposite side of Worcester Street as their designated water source.²¹ The garden coordinators soon realized, however, that if they did not limit watering times gardeners would have the hose hooked up and running across the street continuously. They therefore arranged for the hose to be turned for only two hours each evening.²² Watering time became an eagerly awaited event at the Worcester Street Garden. A gardener in the summer of 1982 remarked, “ ‘People come out with their iced tea or beer and wait together until the spigot gets turned. It’s like a neighborhood party.’ ”²³ This water source, though inconvenient, remained the garden’s only water supply for about ten seasons. Then, in 1992 a permanent connection (precipitated by the local water authority’s crackdown on the City’s water use) was finally installed.²⁴

Although Rutland Washington and other gardens in the area had built gazebos, the gardeners at Worcester Street resisted establishing an official meeting place because it required giving up a plot. However, early garden leaders remember the intersection of the two main paths functioning as an unofficial gathering place where gardeners brought in old chairs for meetings.²⁵ The informal site was made official in 2001, when one of the gardeners donated two benches to the garden, and others agreed there was enough desire to designate a place to sit and talk in the garden.²⁶ A meeting place was established, very simply, by dedicating one of the plots next to the intersection of the two paths and placing there the benches, as well as a donated table, umbrella, and chairs.

²⁰ Worcester Street Community Gardens Association, Inc., Report submitted to the Boston Foundation in compliance with requirements of Small Grant Program, 26 March 1993, Archives of the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust, Boston; Cynthia Gorton, interview by author.

²¹ Douglas MacElroy, "Worcester Street Garden," *The Wheelbarrow: A Publication of the South End/Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust*, Winter, 1993.

²² Cynthia Gorton, interview by author.

²³ Joan Siefel, quoted in Lynne Potts, "Urban Gardens Blossom in South End Community," *South End News*, 22 May 1982.

²⁴ Worcester Street Community Gardens Association, Inc., Report submitted to the Boston Foundation in compliance with requirements of Small Grant Program.

²⁵ Cynthia Gorton, interview by author.

²⁶ Barbara Hoffman, interview by author.

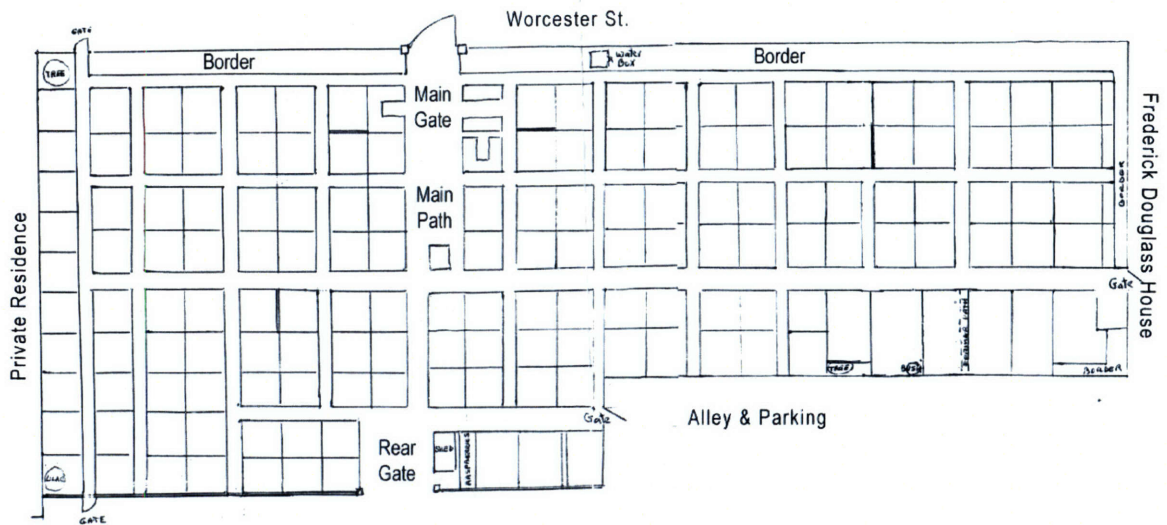


Figure 7: Plan of the Worcester Street Community Garden.

Today, the Worcester Street Community Garden is composed of 155 plots, as shown in Figure 7. The area surrounding the garden is primarily residential. Row houses—containing both single-family residences and condominiums—extend along Worcester and many of the nearby streets. Also nearby are several subsidized housing developments. One of these, the Frederick Douglass House, directly abuts the garden and is home to a number of Worcester Street’s gardeners, some of whom have been members of the garden since its early days. Together, with the more relative newcomers to the South End, the gardeners at the Worcester Street garden reflect the broad range of people who now reside in the neighborhood.



Figure 8: The Worcester Street Community Garden, looking south, with the Frederick Douglass House in the background.

CHAPTER FIVE

Altering the Garden

The community gardens of the South End have, throughout their history, been remarkably positive, friendly, and peaceful pockets in a neighborhood often afflicted by tumultuous change. However, the Rutland Washington and Worcester Street case study gardens show them to be, at times, venues for tension and conflict as well. Some of this tension is internal and specific to the garden, stemming from the challenges of using and maintaining common land. For example, both case study gardens reported issues of some gardeners' failure to weed their plots or take care of designated common spaces such as paths or borders. A few gardeners recalled instances where other gardeners had trimmed or cut shrubs or plants that were not theirs, provoking an altercation. Both gardens have no-pet policies and occasionally have had incidents when a gardener brought a dog through the garden, requiring one of the garden coordinators to remind them of the rules. When describing these incidents, however, gardeners generally attributed them to problematic personalities and the inherent challenges of gardening communally anywhere. They were, therefore, regarded as isolated occurrences and that were easily resolved and forgotten.

However, the two case study gardens also demonstrated a set of deeper, underlying issues and longer-running tensions within the garden community. These issues, unlike those related to the challenges of community gardening in and of itself, stem from the dynamics of the larger community around the garden – the South End. As the previous chapters show, the South End neighborhood has undergone a great deal of change throughout its history and continues to do so. Although everyday life in the neighborhood in recent years seems relatively calm and even peaceful compared to earlier periods of upheaval, the South End today is still a community that struggles to accommodate residents from continually changing cultural and economic backgrounds. As such, difficulties related to race, class, and lifestyle persist in the neighborhood today. These dynamics of the community *around* the garden are a part of the community *in* the garden, creating tensions and provoking conflict. Because these deeper tensions stem from the dynamics of the larger community, examining forces behind changes in the garden and the responses they elicit within their garden communities

can provide insight to changes and consequent dynamics occurring in the South End as a whole. The following brief review provides necessary background on recent changes to the South End neighborhood and community from which to understand the changing gardens and garden community.

Recent changes in the South End

Since the early 1990's, development in the South End has continued to ride the vigorous real estate market and chart the course mapped out by the SENHI plan. Gentrification has steadily increased and moved into the formerly industrial areas of the South End, which were long considered unpalatable to newcomers who generally gravitated toward the area's historic row-houses. Throughout the South End, housing sales prices have continued to escalate, increasing one and half times between 1997 and 2004, and claiming the third highest median sales price of all Boston neighborhoods by the end of that period.¹ Despite the constant rise in real estate values and demand for high-end living, the battles for affordable housing during Urban Renewal in the 1970's and SENHI in the 1980's have left the South End with over forty percent of its units subsidized. Some of this housing is integrated into the larger neighborhood or in mixed-income developments, rather than confined to isolated housing projects. The neighborhood, therefore, accommodates residents with a range of income levels and remains to many a remarkably diverse and integrated area. However, the result of this integration is often only physical proximity of different classes and groups rather than interaction or relationship among them. While the neighborhood does indeed have subsidized units neighboring million dollar condominiums, the level of interaction among their inhabitants is questionable. With real estate values continuing to rise and the gap between the haves and have-nots widening, the opportunity for people of different strata to relate to each other on any sort of common ground is rare.

The social implications of such disparity are not borne equally by all residents of the South End. There are many for whom life goes on in relative peace and for whom the disconnect between those who can afford to pay for market-rate housing and those who live in

¹ The Boston Indicators Project, "Median Housing Sales Price by Boston Neighborhood." (Boston: The Boston Foundation, 2004).

subsidized units does not much matter. However, the blatant divides of class, often corresponding to race, are to some a source of great tension and upset. Josephine Piña, an African-American, long-time resident of the South End described her perception of these divides in a 2004 letter to the neighborhood's local newspaper:

As I was leaving and was walking home, upset, I started thinking about these feelings that were coming up in me, about the change in my community. What I mean is that there is such a contrast in the vicinity now – the well-to-do and the less fortunate ... on one street, white people live in condos and pay max rents and the other streets, going towards Dudley Station, are black people who are struggling to survive financially and the white folks have so much ... they are the ones who are able to 'dish out' for the finest restaurants that have 'popped up' recently around the South End nearer towards the downtown area of Boston ... Going toward the Dudley area or Washington Street, you see no nice restaurants or stores down by us black people.²

Thus, with an ever-rising real estate market and increasing influx of professional, higher income newcomers, there has been a widening disparity in wealth between newcomers and occupants of subsidized housing—some of whom are the neighborhood's oldest residents. This social tapestry, laid atop the fading memories of the neighborhood's tumultuous and significant past characterizes today's South End.

Changes in the gardens

The dynamic between the communities in the case study gardens and the larger community around them are illustrated in the following four vignettes. Together, they demonstrate how a garden community is influenced by many of the same forces affecting the larger community around it, and how investigation of the smaller communities in the gardens may provide insight into the way groups within the larger South End react and respond to ongoing neighborhood change.

The Worcester Street Community Garden: Demise of the Large Plantations

The Worcester Street garden was from its beginning laid out with 10' x 10' plots. At one plot per gardener, the garden could provide about 150 people with a small piece of land to cultivate. However, because there was not sufficient demand for so many gardening spaces

² Josephine Piña, "Letters to the Editor," *South End News*, 7 October 2004.

many gardeners took over multiple plots.³ This condition gave way to what one gardener referred to as the “Large Plantations” – multiple plots under the stewardship of one gardener, with some tending as many as ten or twelve 10’ x 10’ allotments.⁴ These multiple plot-holdings were like plantations not only in that they were big, but also because a few of the gardeners who farmed them had taken to planting the entire area with rows of one crop, callaloo—a Jamaican leafy green unavailable in nearby stores—and selling it to their fellow countrymen who were hungry for a taste of home.⁵ These large plantations can be seen in a 1984 plan for the garden, along with some areas of the garden that were still un-colonized, having not yet been brought under the garden’s landholding (Figure 9).

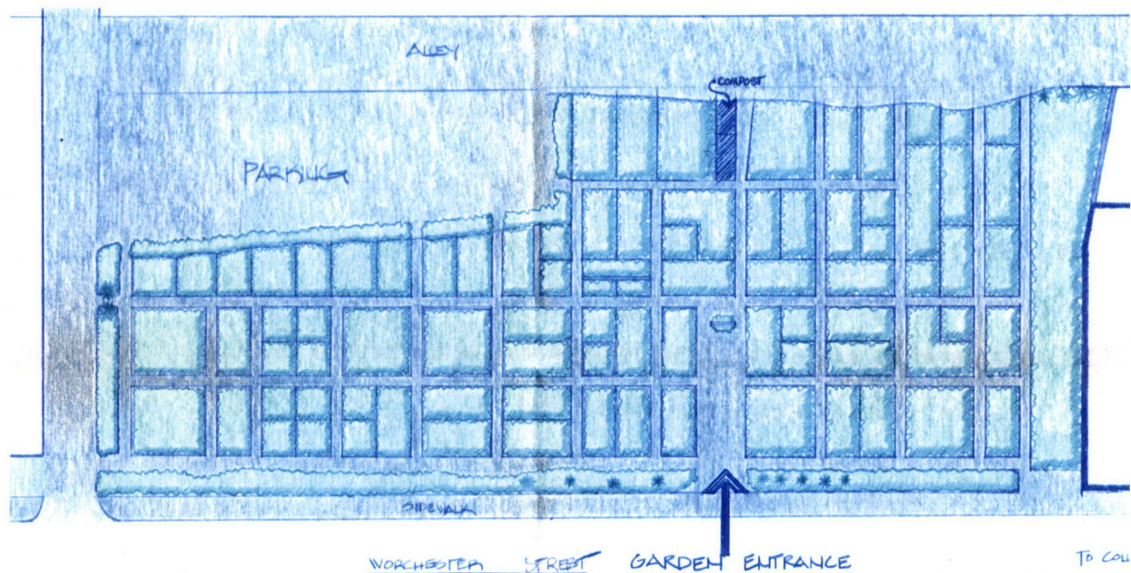


Figure 9: Large plantations at the Worcester Street garden.

Over time, however, several factors have led to the gradual demise of these Large Plantations. First, garden demographics began changing such that several of the largest plot-holders grew old and left the garden community. Also, because the population moving into South End was for the most part higher income and professionally-employed, there was no second generation of large plantation owners with the time, desire, or need to tend ten garden plots to replace those departing. The second factor occurred in 1990 when the Worcester Street Community Garden became part of the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land

³ Worcester Street Community Gardens Association, Inc., "A Neighborhood Garden in the South End of Boston," 15 August 1984, Submitted to the Community Garden Award Committee at the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, Archives of the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust, Boston.

⁴ Barbara Hoffman, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston,, 13 March 2007.

⁵ Cynthia Gorton, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 5 March 2007.

Trust (SELROSLT). Upon joining SELROSLT, the Worcester Street garden also adopted a set of general policies, one of which limited individual ownership of garden space to one or two plots per family or household. Thus, the large plantations began to be vacated, subdivided, and given to a new generation of gardeners. The plot plan from the 1990's demonstrates this increased focus on subdivided, individual plots (Figure 10).

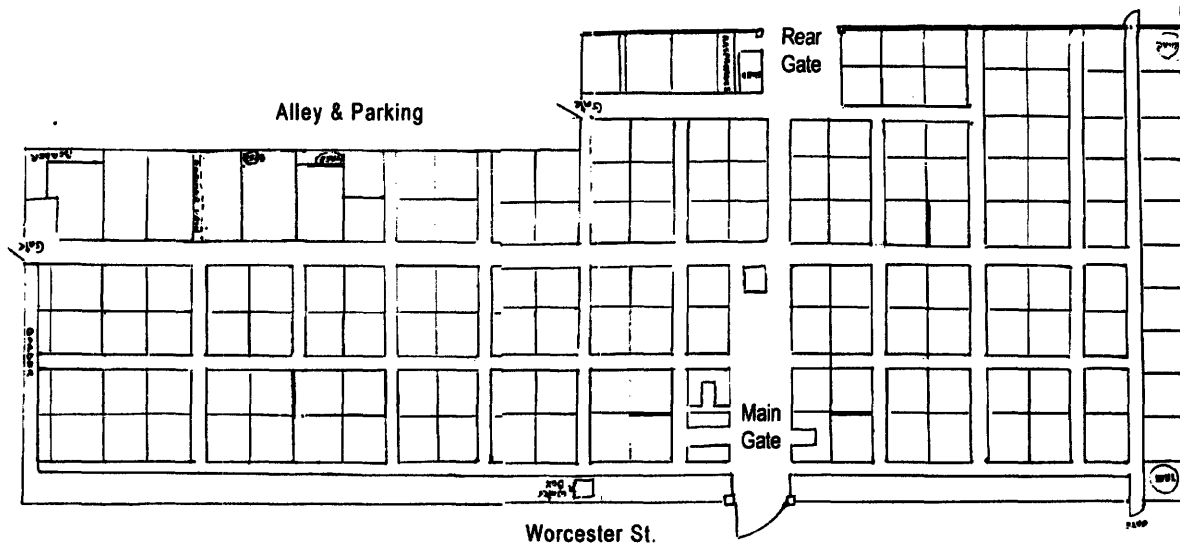


Figure 10: The large plantations at the Worcester Street garden have been subdivided into individual plots.

Now the greatest of the large plantations have been divided up and the policy towards them has officially shifted. However, despite these changes, multiple plot holdings persist at the Worcester Street garden, although they now of three or four plots rather than ten or twelve. The reason for these multiple plot holdings is that when the garden joined SELROSLT, gardeners who had established multiple plots early were grandfathered in under the new policy and allowed to continue gardening their original plots. At the time of this writing there are about four households with three or more plots, and over twenty households with two plots.⁶ Some of these gardeners got their plots in the early days when both demand for garden space and the plot fees were lower, and when the process of obtaining and paying for garden space was more informal in general. When the price per plot rose, however, those with multiple plots were hardest hit.

⁶ Worcester Street Community Garden Association 2006, Member information, 2006, Worcester Street Community Garden Association files, Boston.

This happened in 2001 when SELROST doubled the price it asked its member gardens to pay per square foot of garden space in order to cover its own rising costs. Plot fees at Worcester Street rose from \$35 for a plot to \$60. Those with two plots, then, should have seen their annual plot fee rise from rise from \$70 to \$120. However, because garden coordinator at the time had a forgiving policy toward plot payments and often ignored insufficient or absent payments, some of the gardeners continued to pay the same fees they had before the jump in required payment to SELROSLT. With some of these fees as low as \$10 a plot, the garden began to run a sizable deficit to the Land Trust.

This forgiving policy toward plot payments ended in 2006 when a new group of garden coordinators with a different policy on garden finances brought the true cost of each of those 10' x 10' plots to the attention of the garden community. Concerned that continuing such a deficit would harm the financial sustainability of the garden, the new leaders began approaching gardeners about paying for their plots, an issue that previously went largely ignored. With a number of Worcester Street's gardeners living at the adjacent Frederick Douglass House and of limited income, this issue has brought issues of income and class into the garden and has drawn attention to the divisions between more newly-arrived and older gardeners. Like demographic trends in the larger South End, the newcomers tend to be young, white, and affluent, and can more easily afford the sixty-dollar yearly plot fee. This contrasts sharply with the situation of many of the long-time gardeners who have gardened since the garden's beginning days in the early 1980's, many of whom oppose the new fee. One of the newer gardeners who has served as Treasurer for SELROSLT and is active in the garden's leadership, assessed the situation as follows:

There are sort of newer people coming into the South End who are sort of more affluent than people who have previously been here. And for the new people the fees aren't that big of a deal, but for a lot of the older gardeners who are on fixed income [they are a big deal]. Maybe a third of the Worcester Street gardeners live in the public housing right at the end of it. So there are these economic issues.⁷

According to those interviewed, the increased focus on gardeners' ability to pay manifests itself little in the day-to-day garden operations; it does not produce confrontation or visible

⁷ Andrew Parthum, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 12 February 2007.

conflict between gardeners as they weed and water their plots. However, gardeners and garden coordinators have expressed their concern that the new emphasis on plot fees is affecting the comfort level of some in the garden community nevertheless. One gardener, who is African-American and a long-time resident of the South End was concerned that plots were being distributed primarily according to who could pay, and therefore, only those with higher incomes were getting plots.⁸ The gardener was worried that with the population of African-American and Hispanic gardeners declining and that of younger whites increasing, a balance that had once existed between races and ethnicities in the garden was being lost. Overall, the gardener sensed that the attention to finances incurred by the new administration was causing anxiety and tension for some of the gardeners who could not or had not paid the full plot fee. Thus, although the issues of plot fees and gardeners' ability to pay has not caused verbal exchanges between gardeners, it has added a new element of stress to the experience of the garden.

The new garden administration has also been at the receiving end of some of the tension that has emerged from these financial issues. Two of the three new coordinators have lived in the neighborhood for over twenty years, one of whom has gardened at Worcester Street intermittently within the past ten years. The third garden coordinator is relatively new to the area and the garden within the past three years. However, though two of the coordinators have some connection to the garden and neighborhood, the three major garden leaders together appear as newcomers. This is primarily because they have introduced managerial and organizational and style that is quite different from that of the previous organizer who was, according to the new garden leaders, laid-back, low-key, and well-acquainted with many of the older gardeners. Therefore, the transition to this new administration has brought a sense of "culture shock," to the garden, especially to some of the older gardeners who, according to one of the garden coordinators, do not like change in general. However, while a part of this tension stems from the general dissatisfaction that change often brings, the emphasis on finances is making matters particularly difficult for a specific group of gardeners, a difficulty of which the garden coordinators are acutely aware. When discussing these changes, garden coordinators who were interviewed expressed concern that they might

⁸ Anonymous interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 9 February 2007.

be viewed as overbearing newcomers who have come into an otherwise peaceful situation and made things more difficult, often to the disadvantage of the older and poorer gardeners.⁹

Given these dynamics, garden coordinators have debated amongst themselves as to how to collect the needed fees without placing so much emphasis on gardeners' financial affairs that it alters the feel and function of the garden. On one hand they have emphasized getting as many new gardeners as possible to fill the empty plots who are capable of paying the full fee in order to reduce the debt to SELROSLT. However, garden leaders also acknowledge that prioritizing gardener's ability to pay to the point where poorer gardeners are excluded will undermine one of the fundamental values of the garden – its diversity. While the new garden administration has clearly placed importance on reducing their deficit to SELROSLT and being more organized about plot allocation and payments in general, they have also emphasized their wish to prioritize gardeners' willingness to garden over their ability to pay. Said one of the new garden coordinators, "If we have gardens available, [those who cannot pay the full plot fee] should have them. And right now we have gardens available. I'd rather see a garden being worked than weed-strewn and some gardener not being able to afford to buy in."¹⁰ This belief has resulted in a set of discussions and policies for managing diversity in the garden.

The Worcester Street garden now operates on a two-tiered structure for plot fees. Officially, those who are able pay the full fee (\$60), and those who are not pay about half of that (\$28). However, if a gardener can only pay \$10, they are still given a plot and allowed to garden. Garden coordinators estimate that about 45% of gardeners pay less than the full fee for their plots. Although seen as a challenge and an obstacle to establishing financial stability in the garden, the coordinators have generally been flexible regarding peoples' ability to pay. They continue to grapple with how to remain sensitive to the issue and keep finances on the back burner without causing the garden to go further into debt. While the coordinators have considered asking for documentation of income and establishing some kind of official financial aid system, they have resisted bringing this type of bureaucracy into the garden.

⁹ Carol Bonnar, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 29 January 2007.

¹⁰ Ibid.

“We can’t really ask people how much they make ‘cause that’s threatening,” said one of the gardeners who has been involved in managing the garden’s finances, “but we need to find some way. We don’t want to say, ‘Oh, you look affluent, you need to pay more.’ That’s not right.”¹¹ Some gardeners, upon the request of the garden administration, contribute more than their full plot fee requires, thus effectively subsidizing the gardeners who pay less. Such charity in the garden has not caused any apparent issues among the gardeners themselves. However, neither have the more affluent gardeners’ donations been enough to make up for what the poorer gardeners cannot pay. Thus, a deficit remains.

Another concern of the garden administration regarding the management of its diversity is segregation within the garden space itself. According to the coordinators, at present there is an invisible “dividing line” in the garden with the older, long-time gardeners—many of whom are African-American or Hispanic, and live in the Frederick Douglass House—clustered on one side of the garden, and the newer gardeners who are more likely to be white and affluent, clustered on the other. One of the garden coordinators explained, “As it is now most of the people who live in public housing are sort of on *that* side of the garden [motioning towards the Frederick Douglass House] and those of us who’ve come in later are on *this* side of the garden.” Believing it is important that the garden be integrated, the administration agreed to place new gardeners on the other side of this dividing line between the two groups.¹² Not only is keeping a mixture of gardeners from a range of backgrounds in the garden important for diversity, but encouraging their interaction as well.

Thus, ensuring diversity and an interaction with that diversity within the garden has emerged as a priority for gardeners and garden coordinators alike. This policy, in part, rests on the realization that such diversity is fundamental to the sustainability of the garden and its value should be considered alongside the amount a gardener is able to pay. One of the gardeners who was most troubled by the increasing emphasis on finances, stated that keeping the garden open to all and a place of relaxation and enjoyment should be the top priority, and that peoples’ ability to pay should be disregarded if they are willing to work. A structure that

¹¹ Andrew Parthum, interview by author.

¹² Carol Bonnar, interview by author.

targets those who cannot or have not paid their full fee creates tension, anger, and aggravation, and in the end this is destructive to the garden itself. Garden coordinators are realizing that these open spaces operate on a different currency than simply the revenues generated by plot fees. As one garden coordinator expressed:

“There was one really nice guy, my heart went out to him. He has a heavy accent so I have to listen hard. His son went to Iraq last summer, he’s got nine children, and I know he feeds a lot of his family from what he grows in the garden. So there were two plots near mine that were empty, weed-strewn, and he asked if he could work them, could he have them for his daughter—he was playing a little bit of a game ... and I said sure. And he asked would he have to pay full freight, and I said no [and] ... he’s become my buddy. And when I go away he waters my garden, he weeds, and I figure that’s worth it ... that’s to me an investment. I don’t care about the money, I want the gardens worked.”¹³

To some at the Worcester Street garden, true sustainability depends as much on keeping a diversity of gardeners and remaining respectful of the value each adds to the garden community, as it does keeping garden financials in order. While the management of this diversity may be a source of tension, it is driven by a consciousness of and commitment to the value it brings to the garden and its community.

The Rutland Washington Streets Community Garden: The Gazebo

In 1986, the Rutland Washington garden’s first meeting place, a cabaña tucked into the corner of the garden, was changed to a Victorian gazebo located in the garden’s center (Figure 11). This alteration reflected the neighborhood’s transition from having a largely Latino, African-American, and lower-income population to one increasingly white and higher-income. As newcomers bought renovated condos in the buildings



Figure 11: The Rutland Washington garden’s gazebo, installed in 1986, was originally painted white.

¹³ Ibid.

abutting the garden, they began to complain about the smells and sounds from the cabaña. The garden coordinator's solution at the time was to move the meeting place away from the new condos. Working with the Blackstone Franklin Square Neighborhood Association, the garden community acquired a Victorian gazebo, whose choice was mostly likely influenced by the South End's recent Landmarks designation. Thus, the area's shifting demographics and aesthetic priorities influenced the selection and location of a new meeting place for the Rutland Washington garden, and became the source of its current nickname, the "Gazebo Garden"

In 2005 another set of alterations were made to the gazebo. The changes began with a group of gardeners' general interest in repairing what many agreed was a dilapidated structure. The gazebo had not been painted in over a decade and its struts and ornamental moldings were rotting away. Also, some gardeners considered the inside of the gazebo shabby as well. The shelter featured milk crates and crude benches of cinderblocks and boards for sitting, and also functioned as the garden's tool shed. The group of gardeners therefore saw opportunity for improvement and began to plan for some changes to the gazebo. Among these was to give the structure a new coat of paint. The group suggested three paint schemes: muted green, grey, or white, the latter of which had been the gazebo's original color. The selection was put to a vote, and the green scheme, thought by the paint committee to be the most



Figure 12: In 2005, the color of the Rutland Washington's gazebo was changed to green.

“Victorian” of the three, was selected. The gazebo was painted, the struts and ornamental moldings were replaced, benches that doubled as tool storage were installed. New seat cushions that matched the new paint color added the finishing touch (Figure 12). The gazebo had a new and, to some, an improved look. But the changes were not well received by all.

The most recent changes to the gazebo and their perception by different gardeners reveals the division that some sense between the older and newer gardeners, or as one gardener has dubbed them, the “old and new guard.”¹⁴ At the Rutland Washington garden, the “old guard” are four elderly African-American women who gardened during time when the population in the area was mostly low-income and minority, when garden plots were used mostly for food production, and when the conditions in the garden were far less practically or aesthetically pleasing than they are today. Said one of the old guard of these early days, “We mostly grew vegetables out there then when we were just starting off, and we’d dig up all the rocks ... The ground was just mostly bricks then. You had to dig up a whole lotta bricks to get places to plant things.”¹⁵ These women are also the most regular occupants of the gazebo, sitting there most days in the summer, often doing no gardening at all. The “new guard” are a group of younger, higher-income, white gardeners who have taken a leadership role and incited change in the garden in recent years. It was this group of gardeners that made the most recent set of changes to the gazebo.

While the boundaries between the two guards are blurry and shifting, they are nevertheless identifiable groups that frame the way some view garden dynamics. When the group of newer gardeners made changes to the gazebo, the division between the two guards came into play. A newer gardener who was not involved in painting the gazebo or its aftermath, recalled the circumstances surrounding the event:

There was also some conflict about the color of the gazebo at the time. There was a vote, but it was a vote that was unannounced. And so I voted for white just because I knew that the old guard wanted white. And I thought that the new guard was being insensitive to the old guard, and that we should, as a tribute to the people who founded the garden and fought for making it a permanent garden in the city, that we should really give them the respect that elders are usually accorded.¹⁶

Besides the old and new guard, there is a third group of gardeners, whom I will call the “early Anglos.” This group is composed of the few early white people in the garden, who

¹⁴ Stan Scarloff, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 2 February 2007.

¹⁵ Georgette Wallace, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 19 February 2007.

¹⁶ Stan Scarloff, interview by author.

came to the surrounding neighborhood when it was less gentrified than it is now. One of these early Anglos has actually been in the garden longer than some of the old guard, but is distinguished from them by her socio-economic and racial background which is middle- to upper-class white. On most issues in the garden, these early Anglos align with the old guard and often purport to speak in their interest.

The early Anglos have expressed general dissatisfaction with the new guard. In the case of the gazebo, the early Anglos' perception was that the new guard was imposing their ideas of what needed improvement along with their own set of aesthetics when they were not asked for and not needed. The result was tension and argument among some members of the new guard and the early Anglos.

While altering the gazebo may have stirred up commentary that settled on either side of the old guard-new guard divide, the actual effects of the renovation on the old guard seem to have been relatively slight. Like the plot fees at the Worcester Street garden, the gazebo alterations did not cause a change in the daily life of the garden. According to most gardeners interviewed, the four African-American women still sit in the gazebo, often everyday in summertime, and appear to enjoy it as much as if not more than they used to. One of the old guard said of the gazebo, "It was nice, and then a few years ago it became much nicer because they changed the color. It was always white, and then they changed the color. And then they put the benches in, and there's some of the colors of the gazebo in there [on the seat cushions] ... It's gorgeous."¹⁷

Thus, the tension surrounding the gazebo renovation was not so much about whether it would create a better or worse meeting place. It was about a group of newcomers who made changes to a place whose past they did not appear to understand or respect, as well as the people who were a part of it. This is not to say the new guard was not well intentioned. Indeed, one member commented that he wanted do the renovations largely because he thought it would give the old guard a nicer place to sit. However, these actions and motives

¹⁷ Georgette Wallace, interview by author.

were perceived otherwise, and this drew attention to the divisions—real or imagined—between the old guard, the new guard, and the early Anglos in the garden.

The Rutland Washington Streets Community Garden: Food vs. Flowers

As the previous vignette mentions, when the Rutland Washington garden first began it was, like many of the gardens in the South End, used primarily for growing food. Gardeners were mostly of limited income and could substantially reduce their household expenses by growing vegetables instead of buying them. Also, many of the early gardeners had strong ties to farming, some with direct ties to an agricultural way of life and others who were the second or third generation of a family with such ties. Thus, for reasons partly based on need and partly based on culture, the Rutland Washington garden was a vegetable garden, and its primary purpose was to produce as much food as possible. This agenda was reflected in the garden's design, with plots that extended to the fence, and a meeting place tucked into the corner where large trees prevented using the space for growing food. But moreover, the preference for food over flowers revealed itself in the content of individual plots and the overall appearance of the garden: gardeners planted vegetables, and thus created a landscape of green that grew in rows, clusters, and on stakes and trellises. According to one of the garden coordinators for the Rutland Washington garden who observed the gardens during this early stage, the gardens at this time “had a certain look, an agrarian look, out in the fields kind of thing.”¹⁸ Gradually, as the neighborhood changed, the garden community began to change, and so did the content of the garden plots. People planted more flowers and fewer vegetables. Today, many of the thirty-five plots at the Rutland Washington garden contain some flowers or ornamental plants, and several of the gardeners grow flowers and ornamental plants exclusively.

Although what gardeners chose to plant in their individual plots was not a direct intervention in the garden's design in the way that moving the meeting place was, the increase in flower-growing has affected the landscape of the Rutland Washington garden in a similar manner. Moreover, it has become a point of contention for some gardeners. A newer gardener who grows both vegetables and flowers has observed a “resenting of people who ... don't garden

¹⁸ Rob Cleary, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 25 January 2007.

any vegetables at all, when there might be other people who need some food.”¹⁹ Here, what one chooses to grow is associated with their economic status and economic freedom, which exposes the lines between class that have divided the greater South End for decades and have in recent years become increasingly acute.

Unlike the changes to the gazebo, which do not seem to have disturbed old guard as some feared it would, the transition from food to flower has upset at least one of its members. Having helped her mother tend a one-acre garden in Alabama as a child, this gardener has cultivated a successful vegetable garden for over twenty years at Rutland Washington, and is known for growing collard greens several feet in height. She is generally disapproving of the new people she has seen who plant flowers instead of vegetables. In her view, flower gardening has no utility because flowers cannot be eaten. Also, she thinks that flower gardening does not require as much work as tending vegetables, and therefore, feels that newcomers to the garden who plant flowers do not work hard.²⁰ Those who plant ornamentals, then, are seen as privileged because they have the luxury of growing flowers rather than food. (They also work less, and do not have as much knowledge about gardening as those who do grow vegetables.) Here, the transition from food to flower has emphasized the transition in the economic status of those who come to garden at Rutland Washington and exposed the sense of resentment and marginalization that some feel because of it.

One of the garden coordinators—an early Anglo who has watched the garden change over the years—objects to the increase in flowers because of how she thinks it has impacted the activity or “feel” in the garden. When the garden was used for mostly vegetables and gardeners depended on it for food, the space was used more intensively and people spent more time in the garden, thus giving the space a greater sense of “life.”²¹ To this early Anglo, more flower-growing has meant a less-intensive use of the garden and therefore, less vitality. To her, then, the garden was better when it was a place for growing vegetables and when the activity of gardening was determined by need rather than leisure.

¹⁹ Stan Scarloff, interview by author.

²⁰ Anonymous interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 1 February 2007.

²¹ Anonymous interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 22 January 2007.

Not all of the long-time gardeners think these changes are for the worse, however. One of the old guard who has gardened for almost twenty years believes that the increase in flowers has made the garden better. Although she herself chooses to plant mostly vegetables, from her perspective the garden is much prettier and more enjoyable to view from her perch in the gazebo. For her, there is no tension between the food-producers and flower-growers. In fact, one of the new guard who grows flowers exclusively has helped her with her garden and taught her the names of some of what he grows.²² Therefore, while the transition from food to flower has clearly affected the look—and to some extent the feel of the garden—whether one equates these changes with improvement or loss depends on their belief of for and for whom garden should be.

In addition to the preferences of the newer gardeners, changes to what is grown at Rutland Washington have also been prompted by an increased emphasis on the appearance and aesthetics of the garden. Although it is likely that there was some objection to the garden's appearance beginning in the mid-eighties as with the gazebo, gardeners report that the pressure to improve the garden's outward appearance began when it joined SELROSLT. At that point, SELROSLT wanted to the gardens to appear as permanent, well-cared for open spaces. Gardens belonging to the Land Trust were therefore asked to create a visual boarder around the garden if one was not already in place. While the Rutland Washington garden has had a border of irises along Washington Street since its early years, when it received its new fence in the early 1990's the borders were also widened and new flowers and shrubs planted (see Chapter 4). Since this renovation, the border has been jointly managed by garden coordinators and other gardeners who are willing to take responsibility for different sections of this common space.

Thus, the borders of the Rutland Washington garden, while different from individual plots in that they are intended for decorative plants and flowers, have also raised issues of who plants what in the garden and why. With the expansion of the borders and increased emphasis on the garden's appearance, there has also been increased conflict over what that appearance constitutes and who has authority to decide. Two of the three current garden coordinators—

²² Georgette Wallace, interview by author.

both early Anglos— have learned to grow hardy specimens in the borders after seeing the fragile plants they originally planted suffer damage or theft and the border become unattractive and sparse. However, recently these garden coordinators have found to their frustration that the new guard has advocated to add fragile and rare specimen plants to the borders and, despite their warnings to the contrary, has gone ahead and planted them. The result, according to one of the garden coordinators, is that these beautiful plants have been picked and carried off. Thus, these coordinators are frustrated that the new guard did not heed or respect their warnings.

Adding to the early Anglo's sense of disrespect is the failure for the new guard to realize the meaning behind of some of the existing border plantings they wished to replace. Said one of the coordinators:

A lot of those plants we had were heritage that passed along, and the people that had them are gone, and they had special meaning and were part of the history of the garden. And just 'cause...they don't meet your aesthetic criteria doesn't mean they're not valid choices and there's [not] a reason for them. It's not some arbitrary decision. There's a real reason for this.²³

Not only were the decisions of the new guard not practical ones for a community garden abutting a busy street, but they also were not sensitive to or respectful of the meaning behind some of the previous gardeners' plant choices and, by extension, the garden's history overall.

An additional component to the dispute over the borders for one of the early Anglo garden coordinators is the penchant of some of the new guard for planting annuals. These plants—unlike perennials, which reproduce through their roots—spread by dropping seed. According to this garden coordinator, each fall the new guards' annuals in the common borders blow seed around the garden and behave like weeds in other garden plots.²⁴ Planting annuals, thus, imposes a cost upon other gardeners who may not want flowers in the garden at all. Having these plants in the garden's common borders is, to this garden coordinator, evidence of the new guard's obliviousness to the needs and concerns of other gardeners and community gardens in general, and those of the Rutland Washington garden in particular.

²³ Rob Cleary, interview by author.

²⁴ Anonymous interview by author, 22 January 2007.

Like the gazebo, these planting preferences and border conflicts expose divisions in the garden community over what the community garden should be, and who it is for. For some, it is a place where the need to produce food should direct its form and function, with little or no attention to its aesthetics. For others, as a public open space in a historically Victorian and now upscale neighborhood, it should be a place for both growing and displaying decorative plants. For others, the purpose of the garden is somewhere in between. Implicit in these conflicting points of view is a debate about whether the garden should be protected for people who are similar to the low-income, minority gardeners who started it, or whether it should simply follow the demographic trend in the larger neighborhood and become increasingly affluent and white. Thus, at the heart the conflict over what is planted in the garden and why is the issue of who gets to be in the garden at all. Like the Worcester Street garden, Rutland Washington has dealt with this issue through a dispute over how to allocate its plots.

The Rutland Washington garden, unlike Worcester Street, never had large plantations and does not have gardeners with multiple plots. It has not had a problem of a lack of gardeners to fill the plots in the past nor does it today. On the contrary, the garden is one of the most popular gardens in the area and has a long waiting list. Therefore, garden coordinators must decide who of the many applicants gets one of these coveted spots. Additionally, because plots are irregularly shaped, they must also decide who gets the larger plot and who the smaller. This task has emerged as a key issue at the Rutland Washington garden, and is, like at the Worcester Street garden, based on a concern over diversity in the garden, what that constitutes, and who should manage it.

According to the two early Anglo garden coordinators, garden plots were once distributed according to need. In their view, because the primary purpose of the garden was originally to provide a place for people to grow food if people wished or needed to do so, this should remain its purpose today. When considering applications for plots, coordinators would take each applicant's economic situation into consideration and prioritize those who demonstrated the most need. Explained one of the garden coordinators:

... if we had a family that, you know, a single mother, who had five kids she was raising on her own and wanted to grow vegetables and stuff like that, and we had somebody who had a weekend house and a roof garden or was gonna go to Tuscany for the summer—which we have—the person with the five kids would get the big spot. But there's a lot of people who have a problem with that.²⁵

As this coordinator indicates, this need-based approach has caused contention with some of the new gardeners and provoked the new guard to implement changes in the way plots are distributed. The new guard created a formal, standardized application and began distributing spaces in the garden on a first come first serve basis, with little to no attention to need. While the new guard saw this as a more equitable, transparent, and democratic way to distribute plots, the garden coordinators believe it has reduced their ability to give plots to those who need them most. Though the overall population in the surrounding area has become increasingly affluent, the garden coordinators assert that there are still many in the neighborhood for whom the garden could be a much-needed source of food.²⁶ The Rutland Washington garden's priority, therefore, should be to serve this need. The coordinator above further explained:

There are still a lot of low income people in the neighborhood that have not been moved out because of the amount of public housing. And their lifestyles haven't changed. They still have a lot of children, still have a different agenda and cultural imperatives from the mainstream and people are getting older and older everyday and there's more baby boomers and there's gonna be more and more elderly people. And those gardens need to reconnect with those people, and I think there's a disconnect there. And how to fairly access these people? Like I said earlier, I want to go back to when we sit down and we have a group of candidates and speak to them about what their need is in an open fair way, and say listen, if you're gonna be in Provence for August and September, and you have a house with a backyard, do you really need this also? I've got somebody that doesn't have a windowsill. And I don't think that's unfair.²⁷

These two early Anglo coordinators at Rutland Washington are, therefore, struggling to keep a certain population in the garden, a population that currently lives nearby, but is not able to access the service the garden could provide. Part of the problem, say the two coordinators, is that members of the population they hope to help do not feel that the garden is theirs

²⁵ Rob Cleary, interview by author.

²⁶ Anonymous interview by author, 22 January 2007.

²⁷ Rob Cleary, interview by author.

anymore. One of the coordinators expressed her frustration that it was difficult to get the people who need it most on the waiting list for the garden. Another coordinator, speaking specifically of the population living in subsidized housing near the garden, remarked, “It pains me to see some of these people sitting on a park bench over across kiddy corner to the garden, instead of being in the garden. They’re being displaced.”²⁸

Thus, in the eyes of these coordinators, the garden is losing touch with its original purpose. As the current old guard gets older, the garden’s population resembles and less and less what it did originally, that is, largely minority, low-income gardeners who grow food. With no mechanism to recruit a similar population, the coordinators feel, the garden community will be driven by trends in the larger community, and therefore become increasingly young, white, and affluent. And this runs counter to what they think the gardens should be and who they should be for.

However, like dynamics surrounding changes to the gazebo, the change in who comes to garden at Rutland Washington is not seen by everyone as a loss. In fact, one of the old guard believes the changes have made the garden stronger, largely because there are more young people there now and there once was not. When asked what she thought the garden might be like a few years, she responded:

All I can see that it’s getting better. ‘Cause they have more younger people there, and they can do more ... And the older people that’s there, they’re not trying to get us out. They’re trying to help us so we can stay there, you know? And that’s great. We got a lot of strong, young people out there, and we can depend on them.²⁹

This gardener also remarked that she liked the new vitality brought by the increase in young families with children to the garden. She has found everyone friendly and enjoys talking to the parents and children. For her, the increase in newcomers is making it a better place to be for everyone, and thus the garden is serving the exact purpose that it should be. Thus, like the dynamics surrounding the changes to the garden’s gazebo, the effects of the transition

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Georgette Wallace, interview by author.

from food to flowers may be less important than the way they are perceived and interpreted by various groups in the garden.

The Worcester Street Community Garden: Planning the Pavilion

The final vignette describes an alteration of the Worcester Street garden still in progress at the time of this writing. Planning for the pavilion began in the summer of 2006 when one of the garden's new coordinators decided that the current meeting place could be changed for the better. The space—an empty plot with two benches, a table, and chairs—received constant use, the coordinator noticed. However, the space seemed generally degraded: there was no substantial shelter from the sun or rain, chairs often sank in the mud when the ground was wet, and the table and chairs had become rusted over time. In addition, the Worcester Street garden had hosted several concerts that summer, and the coordinator had visions of a better venue for future events. A new meeting place, it seemed, would be an enormous benefit to the garden, and the coordinator went about making plans.

At the same time two instructors from the Boston Architectural Center (BAC) were looking for a community project to undertake for a design-build studio they would be teaching the following spring. The instructors contacted SELROSLT, who, having learned of the garden coordinator's desire to create a new meeting place, put the two architects in touch with the Worcester Street garden administration. With an interested designer and builder, the new garden coordinator then wrote a grant to cover the costs of the materials. Thus, plans for the pavilion were soon underway.

During this time, however, there had been no communication with the gardeners regarding the upcoming project, and nor were there immediate plans to do so. The garden coordinators imagined a process where designers would create three alternatives for a meeting place that would be unveiled to the garden community in the early spring. The garden community would then be given the opportunity to vote on which one they liked best, and the following week, the garden coordinators would report to the BAC on which design they had chosen. The architects in the design-build studio would then build the project. However, this initial process omitted any opportunity to ask the garden community whether they wanted the

project in the first place, and if so, what the structure might look like. Moreover, it failed to negotiate with the gardeners as to where the structure would be placed within the garden space. The coordinators would soon discover, however, that to the gardeners, such issues were not givens, nor were they trivial matters.

The first resistance to the project emerged, not from whether there should be a pavilion, but from its proposed location. The garden coordinators had chosen a site at the garden's center, near the meeting of its two main paths. This location, however, necessitated taking a current gardener's plot. The garden coordinators did not anticipate this would be a problem as they would provide the gardener with her first choice of any available spot in the garden.

However, when the coordinator leading the project called the gardener to tell her about the planned pavilion, the gardener refused to give up her plot. The director of SELROSLT, who had voiced full support of the project, also spoke with the gardener, only to receive the same response. Thus, the garden coordinators soon realized that they would have to change their plan. As asking gardeners to give up their plots had resulted in vehement refusal, the coordinators deduced that they would have to arrange for the pavilion to occupy the site of the current meeting spot. The coordinators notified the architects and, with apologies, asked them to amend their designs.

By this time, the gardener who had first been asked to give up her plot had contacted other gardeners and cast a negative light on the project. In addition, a gardener whose plot abutted the proposed site had gotten word of their plans and called one of the coordinators, threatening to oppose the project if the structure cast shade on his garden. Thus, the coordinators began to realize their plans might not necessarily find favor with all of the gardeners. The garden coordinator who had initiated the project expressed this concern and a growing realization of the need to include the garden community in the planning process:

Now, the gardeners don't know about it. And we have to, we need their buy in. I don't know how *that's* going to go. I have to figure out how to explain it to them, or just *present* to them the concept. People that I've talked to individually, pretty much say that's great, but I'm speaking to my neighbors. I don't know how it's going to go over with the old timers.³⁰

³⁰ Carol Bonnar, interview by author.

With the sense that opposition to the project was growing, particularly among the garden's long-time gardeners, the garden coordinators realized they needed to change their process. One of the coordinators suggested holding an additional meeting prior to the one already scheduled, to allow the garden community to vote on whether they wanted the project. Though they had not originally intended to let the gardeners decide whether there would be a pavilion or not, after experiencing such resistance, the coordinators agreed they needed to let them decide. An emergency meeting was held to announce, discuss, and finally vote on the pavilion. The lead coordinator remarked later on that this meeting was something they should have scheduled long before the project had gotten so far.

The first meeting to discuss plans for the pavilion and vote on whether the project would go forward took place in the community room at the Frederick Douglass House. From the outset, it was tinged with skepticism for the project and general tension. Garden coordinators, aware of the breach in trust caused by trying to implement a project that affected the garden community without their support, began the meeting unsure as to whether the gardeners would support the project or vote it down. Though most of the meeting proceeded without upset, the tension between some of the gardeners worked its way into the conversation. The most vocal complaint was voiced by one of the original gardeners at Worcester Street, who objected to the project on the grounds that a pavilion had never been and still was not a priority for the garden. A field note from the meeting recounts the exchange between the original gardener and the new administration:

An old-time South End resident, who has been in the neighborhood since the late sixties raised her hand. She is one of the original gardeners, known for having strong opinions. She got permission to speak. She explained that she had been a garden coordinator five years before and has kept list of their priorities for the garden. She then read list of priorities off of pad of paper, explaining that she and other gardeners came up with these priorities five years ago, but the issues haven't been resolved: the railroad ties need to be replaced; the fence needs repairs. Why aren't you doing anything about *these* issues? she asked. The lead garden coordinator responded, sounding annoyed, like they had been through this before. C'mon [name of old-time gardener],

you know better [then to bring this up now]. We didn't know about these [old priorities]. Another garden coordinator quieted the issue by thanking the gardener for informing them of these priorities and promising to look into improving the issues in the future.³¹

This gardener's complaint implies that the older gardeners knew what the real issues of the garden were, and that new garden coordinators did not, yet neither the old gardeners or any of the other gardeners had been included in the discussion. The pavilion was not a priority for some of the gardeners, even though it was for the new administration. Additionally, gardeners had previously discussed the possibility of putting a gazebo in the garden but had decided against it because it would take up more space than gardeners were willing to give up. Thus, proposing the pavilion was, in a way, disrespecting this piece of the garden's history.

Besides distrust for the new garden coordinators, a skepticism of new gardeners in general made an appearance in this first pavilion meeting, as the following interaction demonstrates:

About ten minutes into meeting, a young couple came in and sat in the back of the room. The couple is white, and look like young-professionals, well-dressed even for Saturday morning. They are clearly two of the South End's new residents and they stick out in the middle of the gardeners, most of whom are older, some minority, and un-stylishly dressed. The man asks a question about whether they would have to paint the pavilion, what materials it would be made of and how much repair would it require. Across the aisle a large, African-American woman, who probably lives in 755 Tremont (no coat) became agitated with their questions. She asked the man why he was asking so many questions, and finally said, Look, you're new, you're *brand new*. The man shrugged, looking slightly uncomfortable, but replied, Yeah, I'm new, but we're the younger ones, and we're the ones who have to do all the repairs.³²

Implicit in this exchange is the lack of credibility some of the newer gardeners may have in the eyes of those who have been there longer, and how the old-new divide often reinforces divides of race and class as well.

Despite episodes of tension, the meeting overall became increasingly positive and in a peaceful manner. When asked to vote all raised their hand in support of the project except

³¹ Personal observation, Boston, 22 February 2007.

³² Ibid.

the previously mentioned long-time gardener and former coordinator, and one gardener who abstained. The project would therefore go forward with a second meeting in the following weeks to select the final design.

The next time the gardeners gathered, again in the common room of the Frederick Douglass House, it was to hear the architect's design proposals. Three teams of two architects each, all of whom were white and male, presented their designs with a graphics board and model. After the architects spoke, gardeners were invited to walk around and observe the rendering and models more closely. Gardeners conversed freely with the architects, asking them to explain their designs in greater detail. The general response from the gardeners was positive, with lively conversation and laughter heard throughout the room. In the question-and-answer period that followed, one of the gardeners commented that he liked them all and was having a hard time deciding which one to pick. Another said she wanted one of each. Overall, there was a sense of approval and enthusiasm for the designs and the project, and most if not all of the distrust that was sensed at the first meeting had faded.

Planning the pavilion for the Worcester Street garden was not, as were the other vignettes, characterized by divides between different racial, ethnic, or class groups. However, the process did reveal a tension—common to all of the garden stories—between long-time gardeners and newcomers to the garden. Like the issues in the Demise of the Large Plantations, Planning the Pavilion was largely precipitated by the actions of a new garden leadership whose management, communication style, and, indeed, entire agenda for the garden are markedly different than those of the previous administrators. When the new leadership engaged in planning for a major alteration to one of the garden's common elements, several aspects to the process deepened the perceived line between old and new.

One of the factors in this division between the older gardeners and new administration was the coordinators' failure to notify gardeners of their intentions and include them in the early stages of the planning process. This resulted in the gardener whose plot was slated for removal to make way for the pavilion to build a resistance to the entire project that was

thought by one of the garden coordinators to come principally from the older gardeners.³³ Thus, the changes associated with new leadership and failure to make all of the gardeners part of their decision-making process set up a divide between the old and new that infused the early stages of the planning for the pavilion.

An additional factor in the divide between the new administration and the older gardeners was the failure of the new administration to realize previous planning efforts to consider them in new plans. The new administration had not considered the gardeners' original decision not to build a structure as a meeting place years before. While the new administration may have simply not known about such matters, their failure to conduct due diligence and find out may have been perceived by some as a lack of respect for the garden's history and the history of the garden community.

Aside from illustrating some of the divides between old and new that permeate all of the vignettes, Planning the Pavilion also demonstrates the importance of inclusive planning at any stage and in any setting. When resistance to the project began to build, the new administrators realized they needed to notify all of the gardeners of the plans to alter the garden if the project was to have any chance of implementation. And although the planning action was for the removal of a 10' x 10' plot in a community garden (of which its gardener had no legal ownership), the proposal to relocate the gardener elsewhere in the garden provoked passionate opposition. Sensing the power of this resistance, the garden administrators decided to change their plans to alter the garden rather than alter the garden community.

When the community was included and their input incorporated into the new meeting place's design, the response was generally positive. The transformation of the skepticism evident at the first pavilion meeting to the enthusiasm and approval that characterized the second meeting indicates some of the benefits of community-based planning and design. But perhaps even more important than the benefits themselves are the lessons such a process teaches its participants. Both the lead garden coordinator and the architects remarked that

³³ Brandon Prinzing and Mason Pritchett, personal communication, Boston, 19 February 2007.

they had been challenged and learned substantially from going through the process, a process which, were it not for the testing grounds of the community gardens, few of them might otherwise ever experience. In addition, the two instructors from the BAC commented on the instructive and rewarding nature of the experience. Leading the project enlightened them as to the challenges of designing for a diverse community, and in the end, provided them with the rewards of overcoming that challenge. For these two architects, the outcome of the planning for the pavilion was more than they had ever expected.³⁴

Thus, this final vignette leaves us with a telling example of how the community garden can teach valuable lessons of how to lead, plan for, negotiate with, and be part of any community at any level. As *Planning the Pavilion* illustrates, and indeed as all of the garden vignettes in some way show, community gardens not only *reflect* the community around them, but are also a testing ground for ways to *engage and enhance* the best of what that community is. In this way, the gardens, microcosms for a larger community, are also models of how to care for a place.³⁵

Elements of the garden's ability to enhance a community's positive attributes and act as a model for improvement are evident in all the vignettes. Though the gardens can be venues for conflict as well as a stage for the positive, much of this potential discord comes from well-intentioned ideas of how to keep the gardens accessible and profitable for all who wish to use them. Thus, the very source of tension in these gardens may also be its source of some of the value they provide to their gardeners. An exploration of this will be undertaken in the next chapter on the Community in the Garden.

³⁴ Brandon Prinzing and Mason Pritchett, Statement on experiences working with the gardeners of the Worcester Street Community Garden, 6 April 2007, Boston.

³⁵ Anne Whiston Spirn and Michele Pollio, *This Garden is a Town*, The West Philadelphia Landscape Plan (Philadelphia: Graduate School of Fine Arts, Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning, University of Pennsylvania, 1990), 7.

CHAPTER SIX

Valuing the Garden

Similar to research on other community gardens, gardeners at the Worcester Street and Rutland Washington derive a variety of benefits from their gardens.¹ The majority of gardeners touched on the personal benefits the gardens provide. For many, the garden is a space of personal retreat and individual enjoyment and relaxation, and a means of relieving stress. As a garden coordinator and gardener at the Worcester Street garden remarked, “It’s very therapeutic to have my hands in the dirt here. It’s very relaxing. I really love it.”² Several gardeners associated the garden space with a sense of peace and removal from the everyday. A long-time gardener at the Rutland Washington garden, remarked, “I like sittin’ out there. It’s so nice and cool and you just have a feeling of freedom. It just feels real good to be out there. And peaceful. You have no one to bother you, if somebody’s coming and you relaxin’, they won’t bother you. I like that.”³

Gardeners who have access to their own private or semi-private open space elsewhere also testified to the value of the community gardens. One gardener at Worcester Street who owns a house on one of the South End’s picturesque squares and is actively involved in its upkeep, remarked that the community garden provided a unique open space experience. The community garden, this gardener described, is an experience of complete freedom. Unlike the restrictions placed on the use of the commonly maintained square, in the community garden each gardener does whatever he or she wishes with their small piece of land. In addition to this gardener, the majority of those interviewed had other private open spaces, yet still chose to cultivate a plot in the community garden.

Other gardeners spoke of the sense of connection to nature the community garden provides. The gardens are a break in the primarily concrete and brick landscape of the city, a place to watch the changing seasons and observe natural processes. Several gardeners commented

¹ For more discussion of previous research on the range of benefits of community gardens, see Appendix A.

² Carol Bonnar, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 27 March 2007.

³ Georgette Wallace, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 19 February 2007.

that they enjoyed the opportunity to watch things grow. Said a long-time gardener at the Worcester Street, “I just love the process of taking this tiny little thing and putting it in the ground. It’s just a bloomin’ miracle.”

In addition to the personal benefits of gardening, almost all of the gardeners interviewed also described the social benefits of gardening. In fact, several gardeners either implied or explicitly stated that what they liked more about the community garden than the actual activity of gardening was the sense of *community* in the garden. When gardeners elaborated on the communities of the Rutland Washington and Worcester Street gardens they invariably spoke of the gardens’ diversity as a strong contributor to their positive social experience. Meeting, mixing, and above all, forming relationships with people of different races, ethnicities, economic classes, and sexual orientation, emerged as a source and enjoyment and point of pride. By emphasizing the value of diversity, gardeners reinforced a long-standing value and definitive characteristic of the South End overall. In considering the value of diversity of these two case study gardens, it is helpful to make note of this value in the garden within their larger context: the South End neighborhood.

As Langley Keyes describes in a work in progress on diversity in the South End, South Enders have long identified the neighborhood’s diversity as one of their strongest values.⁴ However, the definition of diversity in the South End is far from straightforward, and has been frequently transformed over time. At the beginning of the century, diversity in the South End was viewed in terms of a harmonious mix of different races and ethnicities, but because most of its residents were poor, it included relatively little variation in economic class. However, with the start of Urban Renewal and the ensuing dispute over subsidized housing and preservation of low- and moderate-income residences, the meaning of diversity came to include diversity of economic class as well. Then, with the end of the official Urban Renewal period, continued gentrification, and the influx of gays and artists to the area, diversity came to include sexual preference and lifestyle. Today, diversity is still at the top of the list of the South End’s commonly cited attributes. However, its meaning has shifted again to include the area’s urban amenities and other marketable characteristics, such as its

⁴ Langley Keyes, Work in progress, 28 August 2005, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA.

shops, restaurants, and of course, residential options.⁵ Thus, diversity, though its meaning is fluid and expansive, has proven an enduring value of the South End's residents.

The community gardens of the South End have seen their own transformation in the meaning of diversity during the past three decades. As noted in Chapter Three, the gardens of the South End were from their beginnings portrayed as a common ground for the neighborhood's many ethnicities and nationalities, members of which were separated by language or culture. However, as the South End as a whole began to change in terms of class and lifestyle, the narrative of diversity in the gardens widened to encompass different groups. Before long, increasing numbers of higher income and often white newcomers and gays were included in the narrative of diversity in the gardens. Over time it has become evident that these community gardens would welcome just about anybody who wished to join, the only qualification being a willingness to garden.

The study of the two community gardens in the South End demonstrates gardeners' definitions of diversity to be broad and inclusive of ethnicity, economic class, age, and lifestyle groups. For example, one of the original gardeners at Worcester Street spoke of the garden's diversity primarily in socio-economic terms: "People [gardeners] earned very little money, people earned lots of money, people went to public school, people went to private schools ... We have always had a large pocket of people who had second homes."⁶ Another long-time gardener at Worcester Street emphasized ethnicity and sexual orientation in her description of diversity:

I can say with almost dead certainty that the make up of our gardens has been since day one—if you took a sample from the U.S. census, that's it. The proportions of people gardening would, I'm quite certain, precisely match the proportions of the U.S. Census. Of Hispanics, blacks, we have southern black, Jamaican black, Haitian black. We have white gay men, black gay men, Hispanic gay men, one Arab gay man. So even the proportions within subgroups.⁷

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Cynthia Gorton, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 5 March 2007.

⁷ Barbara Hoffman, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 13 February 2007.

At the Rutland Washington, a gardener who wished to remain anonymous, poetically described the garden community as a mosaic of people of different ages, races, ethnicities, sexual preferences, and religions.⁸

One of the reasons these community gardens are able to accommodate such diversity is the nature of gardening itself. It is an activity that appeals to people from an array of backgrounds, cutting across the different groups described above. Gardening has long been rated as one of the most popular leisure-time activities in the country, and its popularity continues to increase. Research conducted in 2005 by the National Gardening Association found that eighty-three percent of all U.S. households participated in lawn and garden activities, setting a new record for the percentage of households participating in lawn and garden activities.⁹ While much of this activity takes place in private home gardens and lawns, the general enthusiasm for gardening lends itself to an interest in the community garden. A newly-arrived resident who formerly tended a private garden in the suburbs might have just as much interest and desire for an urban community garden plot as would a long-time neighborhood resident who raises food for a family. An interest in gardening can be transferred as fluidly across differences in ethnicity and culture as it is across differences in class.¹⁰ One of the key factors in the initial success of community gardens in the South End was the enthusiasm and energy of first and second generation immigrants who had little in common but their knowledge of agriculture and desire for space to garden. Similarly today, while there are fewer residents of the South End with living memories of raising crops in the fields of their native country, the gardens continue to demonstrate the transferability of different gardening styles and crops to community garden plots. Southerners grow collard greens, Jamaicans grow callaloo, and Chinese gardeners plant bitter melon and pea pods.

⁸ Anonymous phone interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 24 February 2007.

⁹ National Gardening Association, "Garden Market Research: 2005 Proves a Banner Year for the Gardening Industry," (South Burlington, VT) <http://www.gardenresearch.com/index.php?q=show&id=2602> (accessed 13 April 2007).

¹⁰ Sam Bass Warner Jr., *To Dwell is to Garden: A History of Boston's Community Gardens* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987).

The broad appeal of gardening is recognized by present-day gardeners at the Rutland Washington and Worcester Street gardens. A garden coordinator for Worcester Street spoke of seeing more affluent gardeners use their plots to grow flowers for bouquets and herbs to supply summer dinner parties and those of limited income to grow food.¹¹ Though at the Rutland Washington garden what people choose to grow has surfaced as a source of tension for some of the gardeners, it was also observed as a source of camaraderie among gardeners of disparate backgrounds at both gardens. One of the “old guard” at of the Rutland Washington, while acknowledging the changes that had occurred within the garden community, concluded that those changes mattered little to that community because of everyone’s common interest in gardening. “When we first started out it was mostly black and Spanish, maybe a few white people,” she recalled, “But ... now it’s mostly the other people, and most of them are white. But there’s no problem cause everybody’s out there for the same thing. To garden and enjoy it.”¹² Thus, for some, the unifying function of the community garden overshadows its tendency to create tension and conflict.

One of the original gardeners at Worcester Street who has watched the garden community change over the years, described the inclusive nature of gardening and its effect on the garden’s diversity:

... the thing that I love about the garden is that gardening is one of the few things in our society that cuts across every level of society. The love of gardening just is everybody. And one of the things when I say what I love about it is Bea [an African-American gardener]—who is now ninety, I believe, and has been gardening for years and years and years in the garden—seeing Bea teaching a young, white, gay man how to garden. That would *not happen* in any other setting. Our youngest gardener was eleven, our oldest – we’ve had a number over ninety, and every age range in between. We’ve had doctors, people with less than an eighth grade education, people on assisted living, subsidized housing, people with million-dollar buildings. Just every range of income, every level. And there’s a community to it, to community gardening, that is really real. It’s just remarkably across-the-board.¹³

¹¹ Anonymous interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 29 January 2007.

¹² Georgette Wallace, interview by author.

¹³ Barbara Hoffman, interview by author.

Thus, the broad appeal of gardening contributes to the diversity of the garden, a diversity that, to many interviewed in this study, adds value to the experience of community gardening.

Although the broad appeal of gardening explains part of the diversity in the South End gardens, another key factor is the diversity of the South End itself. In the community gardens today, this is most visible in terms of economic diversity, but also has implications for racial and ethnic diversity as well. The presence of subsidized housing is clearly a strong factor in the range of economic classes represented in the South End overall and in the gardens. In both case study gardens, residents of nearby subsidized housing constitute some of the older, and often minority, gardeners. In the Worcester Street garden, there are several African-American and Hispanic residents of the adjacent Frederick Douglass House—which provides subsidized housing for disabled and elderly residents—some of whom are long-time gardeners. At the Rutland Washington garden, all of the “old guard” reside in The Franklin Square House, located across Washington Street from the garden, which provides subsidized housing for the elderly. A former gardener of the Worcester Street garden who moved to the South End in 1971 believes that the garden has been able to continue being diverse because of the high proportion of subsidized housing. Pat Hynes—member of the West Springfield Street garden, weekday resident of the South End, and author of *A Patch of Eden*, a book about community gardening in four American cities—has also noted the neighborhood’s mix of housing with respect to community gardens: “In the West Springfield garden area there’s a lot of [Boston Housing Authority] senior housing. There is also Section 8 housing. At the same time there is housing that sells for seven hundred, eight hundred [thousand], a million dollars.”¹⁴ This diverse mix of housing creates an economically diverse mix of residents who, provided they have a common interest in gardening, are brought together within the space of the community garden.

However, community gardens do something more than merely bring people of diverse backgrounds together in the same space. They also facilitate interaction between them. This subtle yet key distinction between physical proximity and face-to-face interaction is what

¹⁴ H. Patricia Hynes, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 7 February 2007.

makes the gardens so valuable to many of their users and accounts for the difference between the way diversity is experienced by many gardeners and the way it is experienced by other residents. While the South End may be considered diverse in that it houses both low-income and moderate-income residents alongside those of considerable wealth, for many it is a diversity defined by physical proximity, but not by social interaction or relationships. Hynes, speaking again of her experiences in the area of the South End around the West Springfield garden:

You have what looks like an integrated neighborhood economically and racially. But in fact at a very micro level it is still quite segregated. People of different incomes shop at different stores. They don't go to the same churches, they don't go to the same restaurants. There's such a discrepancy. You could now, if you understand the neighborhood, you could understand who would go to this restaurant, this bodega. And that actually the only place ... people actually rub shoulders, get to know first names and meet is in this community garden. That said, it's not all rosy, but it does in fact function. It's the only place in this neighborhood that has a nice composite, a microcosm, of who lives in the neighborhood.¹⁵

The South End, with its high proportion of subsidized housing and long-standing tradition of diversity, may create proximity between people of different races, ethnicities, classes and lifestyles. However, it does little to engage these people in relationships with each other. By contrast, in the Rutland Washington and Worcester Streets gardens, many gardeners get to know each other. Several gardeners in the case study gardens remarked that they thought their community gardens were one of the few places where people of different backgrounds could mix, and that gardening allowed them to get to know people they otherwise would never have met. Said a white, gay, and newer gardener at Rutland Washington:

The garden itself also has Hispanics and African-Americans, and people who have condos, and people who have run-down single-family houses that they've lived in since the fifties and the sixties ... And there are people you recognize in the context of the garden and then you see them on the street and you don't really recognize them, and then you go, Wait – Ah! I know you!¹⁶

Thus the garden allows one to actually *know* someone who otherwise would have simply passed by on the street, unnamed, and perhaps unnoticed.

¹⁵ H. Patricia Hynes, interview by author.

¹⁶ Stan Scarloff, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 2 February 2007.

By creating a common ground upon which the South End's diverse residents may form relationships, the two case study community gardens are continuing a role that the neighborhood's community gardens have played since their early days. An original gardener at Worcester Street recalled one of her early experiences meeting a neighbor in the garden:

There was a Haitian man who lived three doors down from me, I'd never seen him 'til he started gardening ... He's a bus driver for the MBTA. I don't know what his schedule was but I had truly never set eyes on him, and he lived three doors down.¹⁷

Thus, the garden has, since its beginning in the early 1980's, allowed gardeners to meet people they would never have met in their immediate neighborhoods. A newspaper article from 1981 tells a similar story of Mr. and Mrs. Howko, a Lebanese couple at the Rutland Washington garden. The Howkos had lived in the neighborhood since the early 1920's and watched their formerly close-knit Middle-Eastern community fade as new immigrant groups moved in. After years of feeling that the streets were full of strangers, the couple found that the garden succeeded in building relationships between them. " 'Believe me,' " said Mr. Howko, " 'neighbors we have been passing on the street for years are now our friends, thanks to the garden where we all have little plots.' "¹⁸ Though the social barriers the Howkos were able to cross in the garden were those of ethnicity and perhaps race, today's gardeners bridge divides of economic class and lifestyle, as well as those of race and ethnicity. While today's gardens accommodate a broader definition of diversity, their basic function remains the same – to provide common ground upon which the varied and but often separate groups of the South End may transform their diversity of proximity into one of relationships.

While the broad appeal of gardening and the specific characteristics of the South End neighborhood contribute to the diversity of the neighborhood's community gardens, a third factor also deserves mention: the gardeners' sense of consciousness and commitment to diversity in the South End. A few gardeners indicated their awareness of the value and tradition of diversity in the South End vis-à-vis diversity in the garden. A former gardener at Worcester Street and long-time resident of the South End, speaking of how the garden's presence in the neighborhood determined the character of its garden community, remarked,

¹⁷ Barbara Hoffman, interview by author.

¹⁸ James Stack, "Gardeners in South End Reaping a Friendship Crop," *The Boston Globe*, 1981.

“The South End was always extremely diverse. And it continued to be. And the Worcester Street garden showed that.”¹⁹ Another gardener at Worcester Street felt the diversity and general dynamics of the South End over the years were represented on a smaller scale in the garden.²⁰ Thus, these gardeners saw and continue to see the diversity of the garden community as a reflection of the diversity in the South End as a whole. This awareness of the diversity in the neighborhood may also inform the value some place on diversity in the garden. A gardener at Worcester Street and newer resident of the area spoke of her appreciation for the diversity of the community garden as a part of her experience of the diversity of the South End:

Coming from Cohasset [a small community in suburban Massachusetts] – you would not see a face like you see looking out [a] window [in the South End] when you’re walking down main street Cohasset. You say, how did I live that way for so long? ... I love the diversity, and as I get to know people in the garden and they don’t treat me as an outsider ... the [African-American] woman who has a garden next to me, she’s got several of them. Her name is June and she’s delightful. And she’s got five-year-old granddaughters, and they’re gorgeous children. And one day when I first met her, and so now I’ve followed those children as they’re growing, I visit her in the summer.²¹

Therefore, one of the reasons some gardeners may speak positively of the experience of meeting and forming relationships with a wide array of gardeners is because the experience of living in the South End has led them to value such an experience in the garden. This sensitivity to the value of diversity in the community gardens may be a function of living and valuing the diversity in the South End.

A consciousness of diversity was particularly evident among some of the newer gardeners interviewed for this thesis. While gardeners expressed awareness not only of the sense that the South End was and continues to be diverse, they also expressed concern that such diversity might decline without intervention. A gardener at the Worcester Street garden who has helped to create a plot fee structure that accommodates both lower and higher income gardeners, explained, “The South End is sort of getting – not stratified, but there aren’t that many places where people mix. So I think it’s important that gardens be a place where

¹⁹ Cynthia Gorton, interview by author.

²⁰ Anonymous interview by author, 29 January 2007.

²¹ Carol Bonnar, interview by author.

people mix. And so that's why I feel strongly that we find a way to maintain these [lower income and older] gardeners."²² Similarly, another gardener and garden coordinator who has also undertaken efforts to manage diversity in the garden, is motivated to do so by the diversity of residents she sees in the South End and by the lack elsewhere of common ground upon which to interact with them.²³ Though these actions may reveal tensions associated with diversity, they are rooted in what is perceived as a positive and valuable characteristic of the neighborhood. Thus, through these efforts to manage diversity, the gardens become a place that *reflects* the diversity in the larger South End neighborhood, but one that can *engage* the diversity as well.

For several gardeners, a concern for maintaining diversity was expressed through a desire to sustain the history of the first generation of gardeners, many of whom were minority and lower income. Said a gardener at the Rutland Washington garden, "I wish there were more of a feeling of respect or acknowledgement for the people who actually fought and founded [the garden]. I'd like to see some form of ... some form of acknowledgement of that."²⁴ Similarly, a garden coordinator at Worcester Street, speaking of her concerns for the sustainability and health of the garden community, remarked she would be most worried, "... if in any sense they feel there's not the respect—the old gardeners—for their space and what they do and their culture."²⁵

Thus, the sense of the need to maintain diversity and honor its first contributors is evidence of the value today's gardeners hold for the diversity of the garden, and the greater South End around it. A Worcester Street gardener summed up this ethos with the following:

A lot of those gardeners are the ones who were gardening you know twenty years ago before it was really a recognized garden. We want to respect their work and we want to maintain diversity cause that's definitely one of the strengths is that you meet people that you wouldn't normally meet anywhere else, and you get the opportunity to talk to them and get to know them and share ideas. I think that's really important.

²² Andrew Parthum, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 12 February 2007.

²³ Carol Bonnar, interview by author.

²⁴ Stan Scarloff, interview by author.

²⁵ Carol Bonnar, interview by author.

Thus, an analysis of diversity in the community gardens demonstrates how they may act as microcosms of the communities around them by accommodating a range of races, ethnicities, income levels, and lifestyles. Additionally, the lens on diversity reveals that the garden can act as a model for what the community could and perhaps should be. By enabling diversity to take the form of active social relationships rather than simply passive physical proximity, the community gardens engage and enhance one of the most valued attributes of the South End. In this way, the gardens continue to play a role they have played since their inception, providing a venue for the South End to demonstrate its best sense of self.

PART THREE

The Garden in the Community

The Community in the Garden is one that builds, values, and contests the physical and social landscape of the community garden, and engages in ever-evolving conversation among them. At this scale, the garden is a world unto itself, a community paired down to its barest essentials. Simplifying elements of communities and landscapes of greater scale and complexity, community gardens are a superb testing ground for communities in general, in any place and at many levels. The community in the garden, then, is both a microcosm and a model, one that allows us to observe with great clarity the dimensions of design and dynamics of community contained within the garden fences.

When we lift our heads from the Community in the Garden, however, and turn our attention to the world beyond, our lens reverses to reveal the Garden in the Community. Here we find that, as community gardens have developed as unique open spaces internally, so too have they played a role in the development of the larger landscape that surrounds them. Additionally, just as the gardens hold great value to those who garden within them, they also provide unique value to those in the community around them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Developing the Garden in the Community

The first gardens established in the South End were an immediate success, having capitalized on the neighborhood's eager gardeners, abundance of vacant land, and capable, connected leadership. Over the course of a few growing seasons, the neighborhood acquired a handful of community gardens, the majority of which were created by the South End Garden Project. These gardens made an immediate impact on their surrounding neighborhoods, transforming what had been vacant trash-and-weed-filled lots into clean, managed, green open spaces. While the gardens provided a quick solution to the problem of derelict lots, the vision for community gardens went far beyond that. Garden advocates saw the gardens as the building blocks for a larger garden landscape, with more and more vacant land being converted to community gardens and webs of production developing around them. Shortly after the creation of the first set of gardens under the SEGP in 1976, Mel King described his vision for what the gardens might become:

The Garden Project is just the beginning. We want to get into composting – producing our own topsoil, making people more self-sufficient. We want to use the manure at the racetracks. The gardens will spread. We'd like to see the Southwest Corridor become a garden.¹

King saw the community garden as an element to be repeated elsewhere on the urban landscape, integrated into future neighborhood design and development. In doing so, it would set in motion the development of systems for local economic and environmental self-sufficiency.

In addition to King's vision of the future, the Boston Urban Gardeners (BUG) also saw the gardens as something beyond a quick fix for vacant lots. Not only did the organization support the creation of many community gardens and advocate for open space in general, it promoted the integration of agricultural urban land into local food systems through farmer's

¹ Jeff Sommer, "Luis Lopez and his garden of urban delights: Down on the South End farm," *The Boston Phoenix*, 31 September 1976.

markets, community canneries, and local food co-ops.² Community gardens, then, were part of a broader vision to transform the function of the city into a place of local agricultural production and processing.

At the outset of the community gardening movement in the South End, these early visions were just that – visions. For most, it was difficult to believe that community gardens would become an accepted, desirable, and repeated element of neighborhood design. Though the gardens created by the SEGP and others were successful, gardening in the city was, for some, difficult to imagine as a long-term activity. To establish a community garden with something more than a tenuous hold in the city soil seemed a major feat. As Charlotte Kahn described, “in the beginning it [urban community gardening] seemed like an existential act, like you had to make it exist everyday. That gardens sort of make sense in the inner city at all. That they could work, that people wouldn’t just trash them.”³

However, as the history of community gardening in the South End shows, the gardens did make sense and proved themselves enduring features in the community and neighborhood landscape. Not only were they enduring, they became increasingly popular as more and more South End residents saw the community garden as an essential feature of a healthy, desirable urban neighborhood. Thus, the gardens as Charlotte Kahn recalls, “started to get a life of their own.”⁴ In the South End, this “life” was evidenced in the longevity of the neighborhood’s early gardens, the creation of new vacant lot gardens, and moreover, the incorporation of community gardens into larger neighborhood planning and design. Thus, this vernacular feature of the South End landscape over time proved itself popular enough to be included as a public amenity in new plans and designs.

Community gardens and neighborhood design

One of the most prominent examples of the impact community gardens have made on the official open space landscape of the South End is on the Southwest Corridor Park. The

² Susan Naimark, and Boston Urban Gardeners, eds. *A Handbook of Community Gardening* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1982).

³ Charlotte Kahn, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 15 February 2007.

⁴ Ibid.

Southwest Corridor is a 4.7 mile stretch of land originally intended as a four-lane by-pass road that would connect to Boston's southwest segment of Interstate 95, the Southwest Expressway. However, like other efforts to block major highway projects taking place throughout the country in the early 1970's, residents of abutting neighborhoods and others who opposed the project organized massive protests to stop the construction of the road. The protests were successful, and a moratorium on further highway building was announced in 1970. After two years of re-evaluation, the highway project was officially cancelled. In 1975 it was decided that the construction funds originally allocated to the highway be transferred to transit and community development, and that the cleared land be used for local and regional rail lines and parkland.⁵ The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority began to hold meetings with residents of neighborhoods that abutted the cleared land for the design of the new Southwest Corridor. For the next three years community groups, state and city agencies, and consultants negotiated the details of this unprecedented project.⁶ Through seemingly endless community meetings and many design alternatives, the residents of the different neighborhoods along the Corridor negotiated the crossings, barriers, vegetation, and other amenities they wished to see incorporated into the stretch of parkland closest to them. In several of these communities, and in the South End in particular, people asked for community gardens.⁷ Though the South End Garden Project and the Boston Urban Gardeners had organized and built gardens only a short time before, by the time that planning for the Corridor began community gardens had proven themselves a viable use of land and feature of the urban landscape. Not only were they viable, residents wanted more of them. The gardens were indeed spreading. It seemed that this part of King's vision would become a reality.

The final design for the Southwest Corridor Park incorporates ten community gardens along its almost five-mile stretch. Of these, four are part of the eight blocks that run through the

⁵ Charles G. Hilgenhurst Associates, and Southwest Corridor Project (Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority), *Southwest Corridor Development Plan, Boston, Massachusetts, Fall 1979* (Boston: Southwest Corridor Project, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, 1979).

⁶ Heart of the City "Southwest Corridor Park/Southwest Corridor," (Boston: The Rappaport Institute for Greater Boston, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University and the Center for Urban and Regional Policy, Northeastern University) <http://ksgaccman.harvard.edu/hotc/DisplayPlace.asp?id=11436> (accessed 6 April 2007).

⁷ Ann Hershfang, phone interview by author, Boston, 5 April 2007.

South End. The Corridor's gardens were designed in the 1970's when most neighborhood residents had only recently been introduced to the idea of community gardening, and it was almost a decade until they were finally built in the late 1980's. However, within that span of time the demand for gardening space had only increased, and the new community gardens were just as much if not more desirable as they had been when originally planned. Thus, these community gardens have proven themselves a lasting feature of neighborhood design. In the South End, tucked into the succession of the corridor's plantings, paths, and playgrounds, these gardens are an official iteration of what began as a vernacular feature of the urban landscape. In this way, the community gardens became a repeatable element of city design.

Not only have community gardens been integrated into neighborhood design, but they have also been a major force and feature of land use planning efforts as well. Through the SENHI process, garden advocates were able to bargain for parcels alongside housing advocates. Although they officially labeled themselves as proponents of open space, the main thrust of their efforts was to secure land for gardens. By locking these spaces into the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust (SELROSLT), the community gardens took another step towards recognition as an official element of the neighborhood's design worthy of protection, improvement, and expansion. Thus, by attaining permanent protection, community gardens have further been incorporated into the official design of the city, affecting its form, feel, and function.

In addition to inclusion in community design and planning, the South End's community gardens have also been incorporated into proposals for private development. These examples speak not only to the power and appeal of community gardens, but also the particular design challenges of creating new community gardening space in the city.

The Rutland Washington Community Garden

The first example of a community garden considered as part of a private development in the South End occurred in the spring and summer of 1994 at the Rutland Washington garden. At the time, there were several vacant parcels proximate to the garden that had been for years

the subject of private speculation. A community healthcare center in the South End had expressed interest in consolidating its facilities in a mixed-use building on one of the parcels along Washington Street—the area’s primary thoroughfare—and across Rutland Street from the community garden. The BRA, the healthcare center’s developer, and the Blackstone Franklin Square Neighborhood Association discussed the project, and there arose the suggestion of using the Rutland Washington garden land for the development. Because by that time the Rutland Washington garden was protected under SELROSLT, the project’s proponents realized that, for legal and political reasons, the garden could not be taken for private development without some sort of compensation. It was therefore suggested that, in exchange for the Rutland Washington parcel, a new garden be constructed behind the

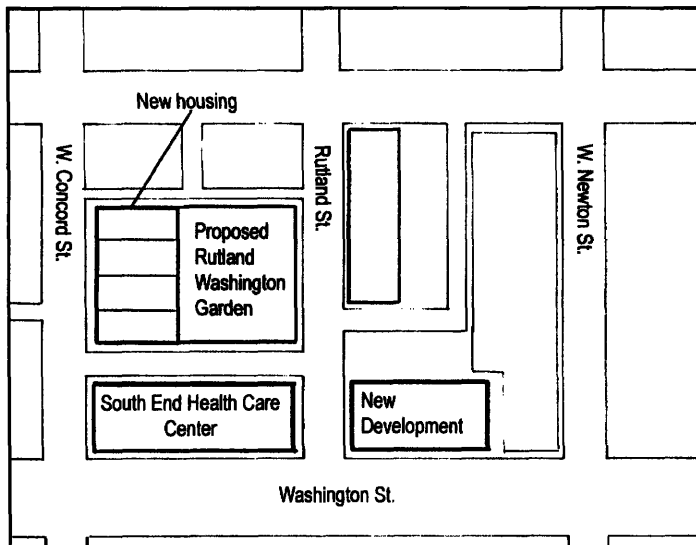


Figure 13: Proposed new location for the Rutland Washington Community Garden.

proposed health center building on Washington Street on a parcel that was part of the overall development (Figure 13). The developer would build and maintain an entirely new garden.⁸ The community garden, the developer realized, was a neighborhood amenity that needed to be incorporated into the redevelopment of this small corner of the South End.

The decision of whether to move the garden was put to a vote by the Rutland Washington gardeners. Although the idea of an entirely new, and in fact, bigger garden had its benefits, in the end the gardeners voted to keep the new garden in its original location. The space for the proposed new garden was instead used for housing. Among the reasons cited by the gardeners not to move the garden were decreased visibility of the garden by the public and decreased sunlight to the garden. Moreover, moving the garden would constitute the loss of

⁸ “Notes on the discussions held to date on the suggestion for the relocation of the Rutland/Washington Garden,” June 1994, Files of the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust, Boston.

the meaning of the garden as the product of twenty years of work that had transformed that particular piece of land a beautiful, fertile, and permanently protected neighborhood open space. With their votes cast, the healthcare center building—which includes mixed-income housing on upper levels and commercial uses along the street—was built on the parcel across the street with low-rise housing behind (Figure 14). The Rutland Washington garden remained in its original location.

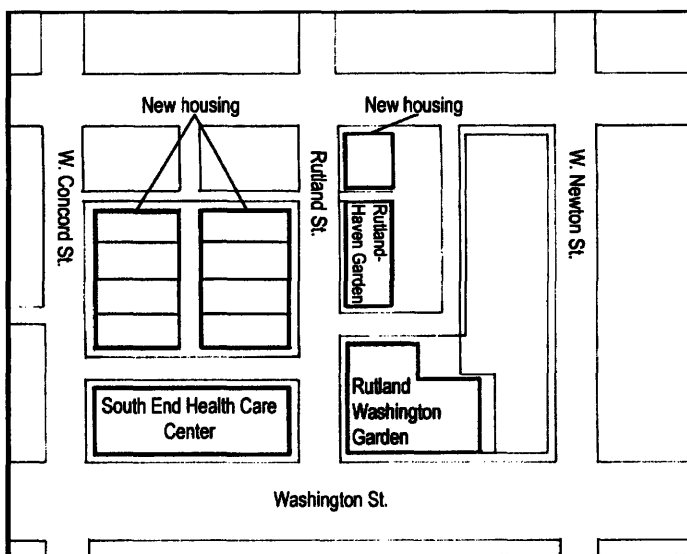


Figure 14: Approved plan with the Rutland Washington Garden in original location.

The example of the proposed development around the Rutland Washington garden demonstrates how a community garden had become a recognized neighborhood amenity considered alongside housing, commercial space and community services in private development negotiations. Though the Rutland Washington garden

was not moved from its original location, the possibility of doing so

and making it a part of an entirely new development was seriously considered by all parties involved. Thus, community gardens were a feature of the neighborhood, something to be planned for and designed into the evolving fabric of the South End.

The Harrison Urban Garden

The Harrison Urban Garden (HUG) was developed on a vacant lot in the 1970's on the corner of East Brookline Street and Harrison Avenue in the southern portion of the South End. Not one of the original members of SELROSLT, it remained unprotected throughout the 1990's but was recommended for future incorporation into the Land Trust along with a handful of other community garden parcels. When one of the gardens that had been guaranteed by the BRA for incorporation into the Land Trust was instead taken for

development, the Land Trust argued that they must receive another parcel in return.⁹ As real estate speculation spread into the formerly derelict southern section of the South End, the site of the HUG became of interest to developers. Also of interest was a site diagonally across the street from the garden. Wanting to develop these highly desirable parcels but realizing the need to make good on their promise to transfer a garden to SELROSLT, the BRA agreed to include in its Request for Proposals the condition that the developer of either parcel on Harrison Avenue incorporate a new community garden into the proposed design.¹⁰ When

Mitchell Properties won the right to develop the original HUG site for mixed-income housing, their design included a community garden on the roof of a parking garage on the site across the street from the original HUG

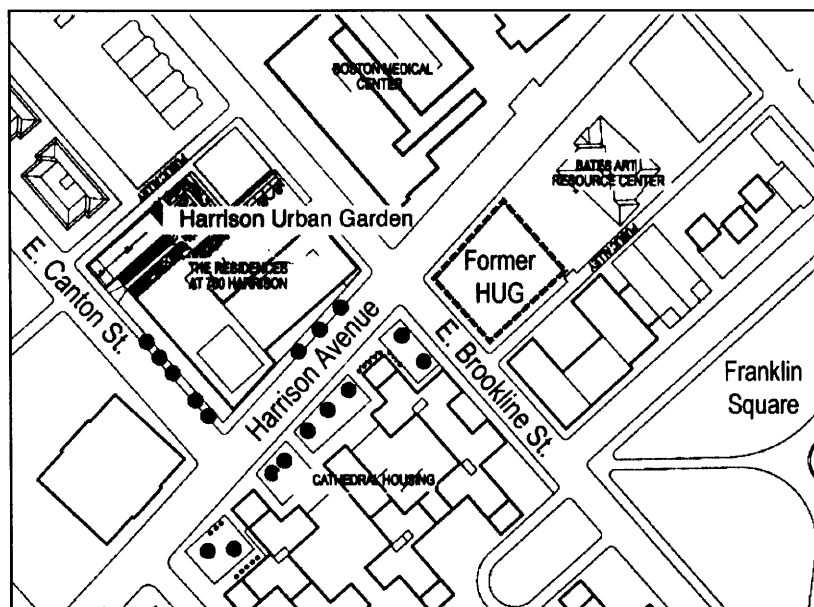


Figure 15: Locations of the former and new Harrison Urban Garden.

(Figure 15). The garden, which will continue to be called the Harrison Urban Garden, will be Boston's first community garden atop a parking garage.¹¹

The movement of the HUG was not subject to a vote as was the Rutland Washington garden, primarily because it was not a part of SELROSLT and therefore did not have rights to its original site. However, the discussion surrounding its new placement generated similar issues to those regarding the potential movement of the Rutland Washington garden. Though gardeners of the HUG were for the most part pleased with the new design, their major

⁹ Betsy Johnson, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 28 March 2007.

¹⁰ James McCown, "Rooted in the Community," *The Boston Globe*, 13 July 2005.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

objection was the decreased visibility the new location would provide the garden.¹² The same issue was part of the reason Rutland Washington gardeners wished to remain on their corner lot. For both groups of gardeners, it was important to remain visible to the rest of the neighborhood in order to both provide a visual amenity and to foster interaction between gardeners and non-gardeners. A second concern common in the relocation discussions for the two gardens was who would have ownership over the site itself. Had the Rutland Washington garden been moved, it would have been incorporated into a separate land trust set up for the new development and would no longer be owned by SELROSLT. This proposal raised concerns not only that the developer would not adhere to his promise to keep the land as a community garden, but also that the garden would no longer be a public amenity. The same concerns were a part of the discussion about the movement of the HUG. In response, the developer of the HUG took measures to ensure the garden will remain a separate entity from the rest of the development. Said the president of Mitchell Properties, “‘This is not a building amenity. It’s a public amenity.’”¹³ Thus, autonomy from larger developments is essential to maintaining community gardens as a public benefit for the larger community of which they are a part.

Beyond the South End

As these examples—and as the development of community gardening in the South End overall demonstrate—community gardens have come to be considered permanent and, to some, essential features of the neighborhood landscape. The case of the South End, and Boston overall, is unique in that action to preserve its gardens and incorporate them into larger planning and design efforts was taken earlier than were in most American cities.¹⁴ However, a handful of other cities have begun to integrate community gardens into land use plans and neighborhood design. For example, Seattle, in its twenty-year comprehensive plan, has created a land-use designation for community gardens and set forth a goal to establish one community garden for every 2,500 households. The city of Berkeley, California, in its general plan calls for efforts to secure more land for community gardening and to integrate gardens into existing open spaces near areas of higher density development that are currently

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Betsy Johnson, interview by author, 28 March 2007.

without gardening space.¹⁵ With interest in both establishing and maintaining community gardens rising steadily throughout the country,¹⁶ is it likely that similar efforts to incorporate community gardens into official open space inventories and the lexicon of neighborhood design will increase as well.

Thus, community gardens have been increasingly accepted as and, moreover, planned for as an official type of open space. However, it is important to note that community gardens remain distinctly different than the majority of municipally-managed open spaces such as playgrounds and traditional city parks. The distinction between the two may be clarified by a discussion of *community* open space.

Community gardens as community open space

The term “community open space” emerged in the early 1980’s both out of nation-wide efforts to address issues of vacant urban land and as a response to the problems of conventionally designed and managed open spaces.¹⁷ The product of almost two decades of inner-city abandonment during which residents of urban neighborhoods across the country reclaimed derelict land for recreational use, community open spaces—which include parks, playgrounds, gardens, and other forms of open space—soon emerged as a viable alternative to the traditional parks system established in many cities in the first half of the nineteenth century. Community gardens, having emerged and multiplied throughout the 1970’s in cities across the country, were a major contributor to this new category of open space.

Defined as any open space designed, developed, or managed by local residents for the use and enjoyment of the community, community open spaces provide for different uses than those of the traditional park and change as needs require.¹⁸ Of the characteristics that distinguish community open spaces from conventional forms, two are particularly salient as

¹⁵ Lenny Librizzi, “Comprehensive Plans, Zoning Regulations, Open Space Policies and Goals Concerning Community Gardens and Open Green Space from the Cities of Seattle, Berkeley, Boston, and Chicago” (American Community Gardening Association, 1999) http://www.communitygarden.org/cg_policies.pdf (accessed 6 December 2006).

¹⁶ Betsy Johnson, interview by author, 28 March 2007.

¹⁷ Lisa Cashdan, Mark Francis, and Lunn Paxson, *Community Open Spaces* (Covelo, CA: Island Press, 1984), 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 1,7.

we consider the unique role community gardens play in the South End. One is that community open spaces are managed and largely built by the people that use them. Unlike traditional neighborhood parks that are most often managed by a municipal department, community open spaces are managed by their users and require their involvement in all stages of development, including design, construction, maintenance, and redesign. The other unique characteristic of community open spaces and, by extension, community gardens, is that they feature an aesthetic different from that of conventional parks. The traditional approach to publicly maintained parks, playgrounds, and other recreational facilities produces a clean, manicured landscape that often requires a high level of maintenance. This is what landscape architect and Professor Michael Hough calls the “Pedigreed” landscape.¹⁹ Community open spaces, conversely, often exhibit an eclectic mix of flowers, planting, and decorations, thereby constituting a “vernacular” landscape that reflects the tastes, skills, and resources of the people that create them.²⁰ These two components, common to all community open spaces, have allowed the community gardens of the South End to remain unique, continually changing elements of the neighborhood despite their incorporation into official open space inventories.

South End gardens as community open space

The majority of community gardens in the South End took the first major step towards becoming officially recognized open spaces when they came under the ownership of SELROSLT. As part of the negotiations with the BRA, the new land trust was required to submit a capital improvements plan for upgrading all of its gardens. Shortly after SELROSLT became operational, they worked with BUG and began to implement the garden improvements. Though BUG and some of the former staff of the SEGP had done similar work improving gardens before, these gardens demanded a new approach because they were to be permanent. The gardens had received a considerable number of complaints over the years for being “messy” or failing to meet the aesthetic standards of some of the area’s residents. Not wishing to have its gardens and gardeners endure more negative comments from the City or other South End residents, the Land Trust determined that the gardens

¹⁹ Michael Hough, “Metro Homestead.” *Landscape Architecture* 73, no. 1 (1983), 54-55.

²⁰ Ibid.

should appear as formal, well-cared for open spaces. They were also to meet historic standards as determined by the Boston Landmarks Commission. While the Commission had no criteria specifically for gardens, SELROSLT staff met with commissioners to discuss their design and agreed upon a set of standards that would be used for all garden upgrades. They would have tinted concrete curbing, steel-picket fencing, and their gateways would be marked by granite pillars announcing the garden's name and SELROSLT's ownership.²¹ One by one they began to renovate the existing gardens, and when new gardens were transferred to the land trust, they were also upgraded. Though the design details varied for each garden, the overall effect was a formalization of what had been an informal open space and a transformation of a vernacular aesthetic to an official one. Thus, the community gardens of the South End took a formative step towards permanence in the public landscape. With security of tenure and a set of general aesthetic requirements, they took on the key characteristics of official open spaces.

However, despite these common exterior design elements, each garden today maintains a unique appearance, largely because each is managed as a community open space. Besides the fences, posts, curbing, and general guidelines to keep a planted border, the rest of the space is a blank template for the gardeners to inscribe their own tastes and preferences. Therefore, not all gardens have a meeting place, some have raised planters, some rain barrels, and some fruit trees. All are differentiated by the content of their common borders and plots: the Worcester Street garden is known for its sprays of forsythia in its borders, and also for the sunflowers and peonies that thrive in some of the plots. The Rutland Washington garden is known for its gazebo, as well as the array of flowers and ornamental plants that many of the gardeners grow. Besides the two case study gardens, some gardens are distinguished by a prevalent agricultural style, such as the intense methods Chinese gardeners employ at the Berkeley Street Community Garden. Thus, although the gardens of the South End have been standardized and formalized to some degree, because they remain *community* open spaces, designed, maintained, and managed directly by those who use them, they continue to demonstrate attributes of vernacular landscapes that reflect the various, skills, styles, and cultures of their gardeners.

²¹ Nancy Kafka, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 4 March 2007.

When considering the ability for these community gardens to maintain their unique characteristics, it is important to note the role played by the management structure of SELROSLT, which allows each garden to remain a largely self-governed organization. Though required to adopt a set of bylaws upon admission to the Land Trust, and though certain expenses such as insurance and taxes are managed by SELROSLT, the community gardens are left to organize most of their affairs by themselves. The gardeners determine how to run meetings, decide how many coordinators they wish to have, how to elect those coordinators, how to allocate plots and delegate garden responsibilities, and also organize social activities. SELROSLT's hand-off approach to individual garden management is further enabled by the structure of its board. Each of the sixteen community gardens either owned or affiliated with SELROSLT send a representative to attend monthly meetings. For every garden representative there is another member, who is either also a gardener at a SELROSLT garden, or from the community. Therefore, at least half of the board is composed of gardeners, and has typically been more than this.²²

This bottom-up approach to garden governance allows each garden to determine what its needs are and how to best meet those needs using whatever resources it has available. Because the board is composed of garden representatives, the gardens remain relatively unaffected by non-gardening interests. Also, because funds are generally secured or raised by SELROSLT and the gardens themselves, and not donated by an outside individual or organization, there are few requirements as to how funds are spent. One garden might choose to purchase new tools while another might need to advertise space in the local newspaper to fill its vacant plots. One garden might decide to build new raised planter beds because of an increase in the number of disabled gardeners, while another puts money into a mailing to recruit people for a garden improvement project. The ability of the gardens to determine their own programs and projects gives them a unique appearance and character, despite that they have been, to some extent, formalized and made an official type of open space. Thus, although the community gardens *have* been brought onto the official land use map and into development proposals as an element of urban design, and though they are

²² Betsy Johnson, interview by author, 28 March 2007.

subject to a set of general rules and requirements from the Land Trust, these spaces remain, unique and ever-changing community open spaces.

The Role of the City

Though the community gardens of the South End benefit from the opportunity to manage most of their affairs, and though community gardens in general require little capital improvements besides basic infrastructure provision and repair, the question of who will provide this basic infrastructure is vitally important to the survival of the gardens. This has emerged as a significant issue for the community gardens of the South End (and for those throughout Boston), where the City has done reportedly little to provide support for infrastructural improvement for the gardens. Though the City funds community gardens through its Department of Neighborhood Development which distributes grants that may be used for infrastructure upgrades, such funding provides only a fraction of what is needed in the gardens. Compounding the problem is that the City has made clear that in order to remain a protected form of open space, the gardens' appearances must be maintained. While SELROSLT has taken considerable efforts to ensure this is the case, the expenses associated with those upgrades are often beyond what the Land Trust, without significant City help, can provide. Thus, SELROSLT gardens are struggling to meet their infrastructural needs. Many of the gardens are laid out with railroad ties that are now rotting and require replacement. Other gardens require new fencing, a project which in a larger garden can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. Although the City does provide compost, it will not agree to pick up trash at the gardens, despite the fact that much of the refuse collected is that which has blown in off the street and whose collection, therefore, benefits the neighborhood. As Betsy Johnson, national expert on community gardens and the current president of SELROSLT remarked, "If we're gonna have properties that are gonna look permanent and be permanent, positive assets in the neighborhood, we need those kinds of capital improvements."²³ In short, though community gardens are largely self-regulating and self-maintaining entities, they nevertheless require a certain amount of public support.

²³ Betsy Johnson, interview by author, 28 March 2007.

As a part of the larger landscape and the community of the South End, community gardens have become a recognized element of neighborhood design. Incorporated into land use plans and designs for public and private development, the gardens have developed from vernacular, temporary land uses to neighborhood amenities and an official form of open space. However, although many the South End's gardens have been provided with permanent protection and have had their appearances formalized to some degree, because they continue to function as community-managed open spaces, each remains a unique and ever-changing entity. With considerable freedom under the South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust to manage their own affairs, each garden has maintained a distinct character and identity. However, although the bottom-up structure of SELROSLT may allow community gardens to make the most of what resources they have, there is still a need for stable support from municipal agencies, particularly for major infrastructural needs. This balance of self-help and public support is one that distinguishes the management of community gardens from more conventional types of open space.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Valuing the Garden in the Community

In addition to the integration of community gardens into neighborhood design and urban open space systems, a key element of the Garden in the Community is the value these spaces provide to the larger community. The issue of the public benefits of community gardens is complicated by the fact that they are not always accessible to non-gardeners. Because most community gardens—including the case studies—lock their gates to prevent theft, they are of limited access to those outside the garden community. However, though they are not always directly accessible to the general public, they nevertheless provide non-gardeners with a variety of benefits, ranging from passive views to active engagement with gardeners. Returning to the Worcester Street and Rutland Washington garden case studies, this chapter analyzes the value that community gardens contribute to the larger community of the South End.

One of the most direct ways non-gardeners benefit from community gardens is simply by walking by and admiring them. During the summer months, with planted borders in bloom and plots in full production, the gardens are a vibrant display in an urban block. Several gardeners commented that either they themselves had enjoyed the garden from the perspective of a non-gardener by the views it provided, or had heard of others who had. One gardener who has been tending her plot at Worcester Street for about five years remembers passing by before she was a gardener there and marveling at the sunflowers that grew to twelve and fourteen feet high.¹ At Rutland Washington, the current gardeners remember when, in the late 1980's, garden advocates were testifying before the City to promote the formation of a land trust to permanently protect the gardens. A woman who lived in an outlying area of the city and rode the elevated train—which previously ran along Washington Street—spoke in support of the garden. For years she had sat on the side of the train closest to the garden to go to and from work watching the garden grow and change with the seasons. One of the garden coordinators at the Rutland Washington remarked that he hears many similar comments today:

¹ Anonymous interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 9 February 2007.

I routinely have people come, and I'll be in the garden in the evening, and they'll say, 'You know, I work downtown, I had such a bad day, and I get out and get off the train or the bus and walk five blocks out of the way just so I can see how the gardens changed and to chill out, and it'll calm me down, especially if I've had such a bad day.' People routinely go to that area over there just to enjoy the garden.²

In addition to providing enjoyment as a green and growing space at the street level, one of the gardeners also commented on the value the community gardens provide to those in surrounding residences. A gardener at the Worcester Street garden who lives in a condo that overlooks the Rutland Washington garden remarked that he chose his unit partly because it overlooks the community garden. In this way, the community garden adds a value similar to that of any open space, providing additional light and expansive views.

While many derive value from the community gardens by looking over the garden fence, non-gardeners also go into the garden itself to get a closer look. In fact, the majority of gardeners interviewed considered having non-gardeners come into the community garden to be a common occurrence. A gardener at the Worcester Street garden described, "I'll be working away, and people will come by and they'll stop and say, Oh it's so beautiful, I could stand here all day looking at it. And I say, Come on in."³ The Rutland Washington garden, due to its location along a commercial street, sees a particularly high number of non-gardener visitors. With several cafés and restaurants nearby that attract crowds throughout the week, gardeners often observe employees of the nearby offices and medical institutions stopping by during their lunch break, sometimes eating in the garden's gazebo. The garden has a policy of keeping its gates open whenever a gardener is present, and during the busiest times in the neighborhood the garden community makes an effort to have at least one gardener present in order to keep the gates open to the public. Another element adding to Rutland Washington's non-gardener traffic is the bus stop located just outside its Washington Street gate, where people waiting wander over to the fence to look in. These nearby attractions produce a fairly steady stream of public attention and visits to the garden from those regularly in the neighborhood. In this way, the garden is integrated in the life of the local community, used place for passive viewing and relaxation.

² Rob Cleary, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 25 January 2007.

³ Carol Bonnar, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 3 February 2007.

In addition to visits from non-gardeners who pass or stop by regularly and are familiar with the garden, gardeners at both Rutland Washington and Worcester Street have observed non-local visitors coming into the garden. Some are from other neighborhoods in Boston, some from surrounding suburbs, and the gardens have even attracted the attention of foreign visitors to the neighborhood. “I remember a conversation with a German woman who was from Frankfurt, I think,” recalled a gardener at the Worcester Street garden, “and had never seen a community garden, and was so thrilled with the idea that I wonder if Frankfurt has a community garden now. She was just so knocked out.”⁴ Thus the gardens, though gated and at times locked to the general public, nevertheless bring people into the garden to walk along the paths, observe what is growing in the plots, and relax in the open space.

Though clearly spaces of passive and individual enjoyment, Rutland Washington and Worcester Street offer benefits to non-gardeners of a more active and social variety through interaction with both the people and products of the gardens. While walking by or passing through the gardens, some visitors stop to ask questions about the content of individual plots, how the garden works as a whole, and how it came to be. At each of these gardens are long-time gardeners who speak to both the garden’s and the neighborhood’s history. Eleanor Strong, one the gardeners with the longest tenure at Rutland Washington, commonly speaks to visitors about the history of the garden, as do the old guard who sit in the gazebo. Said a gardener of almost twenty years at the Rutland Washington garden: “We’re always braggin’ about our garden out there. People come in and we’re always braggin’ about it – Oh you shoulda seen it many years ago, you wouldn’t believe this is the same place ... Yeah, we’re always braggin’ about the garden. We just enjoy it so much.”⁵ Disseminating local history to non-gardeners seemed to occur less commonly at the Worcester Street garden, likely due to the presence of a relatively new set of garden coordinators and to long-time gardeners who seem more reticent than those at the Rutland Washington garden. However, non-gardeners do walk through and talk to gardeners about what they are growing, and occasionally hear pieces of the garden’s history from the older gardeners. A gardener at Worcester Street

⁴ Barbara Hoffman, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 13 February 2007.

⁵ Georgette Wallace, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 19 February 2007.

spoke of the value of being able to speak to some of the older gardeners as a new person to the neighborhood when he first joined the garden: “There’s a lot of really cool history in the South End, so that’s part of the appeal [of the garden], I guess. You know being in a place where there is history and you sort of feel part of it.”⁶ For non-gardeners, engaging with older members of the garden community offers a similar connection to the history of the garden and neighborhood that they otherwise would not know.

Another—and perhaps the most pleasurable—way non-gardeners engage with the garden and its garden community is by receiving gifts of vegetables and flowers that gardeners hand out to visitors passing by or through the garden. Just as gardeners share the fruits of their labors with each other through plant swaps at the Worcester Street garden or by leaving donations in the Rutland Washington garden’s gazebo, so do non-gardeners receive some of these harvests through donations from the gardeners. At both case study gardens, gardeners remarked that if a visitor is passing through and expresses an interest in what is being grown, they most often give them a sampling of whatever is available – a pepper, a ripe tomato, or a flower. At the Rutland Washington garden, a gardener who is known for growing sizable dahlias in his plot described how these instances of handing out garden products had turned into a habit for what he calls the neighborhood “regulars.” According to this gardener, the regulars “... include the people from the housing in the area who come by, either come into the garden or pass by, or live in an apartment looking down at the garden... they see me giving away stuff and they say, Hold on! My boyfriend’s on his way down – save me a dahlia!”⁷

Non-locals also partake of products from the two case study gardens. Because of Rutland Washington’s location along a commercial street that now hosts several destination restaurants, the garden sees more out of town visitors than does the Worcester Street garden. The gardener above described out-of-town visitors coming into the garden on a weekend morning after brunch as a common occurrence, and said he gives out dahlias and discusses growing techniques with the visitors, many who are from the suburbs and have flower

⁶ Andrew Parthum, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 12 February 2007.

⁷ Stan Scarloff, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 2 February 2007.

gardens of their own. Here, the cross-cutting nature of gardening promotes connections across divides of lifestyle and culture for the community *around* the garden, just as it does the community *in* the garden.

In sum, the case study gardens provide a range of benefits for non-gardeners that relate both to their role as open spaces and as community gardens. As open spaces, the gardens provide benefits similar to that of a park, such as a sense of openness in the urban landscape, views, and a place for sitting and relaxing. However, as gardens, these places offer another layer of value for non-gardeners. They are a place to gain insight into the history of the garden, neighborhood, and the communities of both. They are also a place to engage with a living landscape and observe and experience urban agriculture. In these ways, the community gardens offer experiences to neighborhood residents that are rare but vital in today's South End.

Not only do the gardens provide benefits to local residents, but also to non-local visitors to the neighborhood. As an element of the public landscape of the South End, these gardens act both as amenities for the people that live there and as points of interest to those who are passing through. The benefits of community gardens provide to non-gardeners as both open spaces and as gardens, and for both local and non-local visitors are summarized in Figure 16.

Benefits of Community Gardens to Non-gardeners	
AS OPEN SPACE	AS A GARDEN
Sense of openness and views from abutting residences	Opportunity to receive vegetables and flowers from gardeners
Views of green space for those walking by	Opportunity to talk to gardeners and learn about what is grown
Displays of crops and flowers for those walking through	Opportunity to learn about history of garden and neighborhood
A space for sitting and relaxation	Participation in garden tours and events

Role of community gardens to local and non-local non-gardeners	
LOCAL	NON-LOCAL
Garden is a neighborhood amenity	Garden is a neighborhood attraction and point of interest
Residents may develop personal relationship with garden and gardeners	Garden contributes to non-gardeners' experience of the South End

Figure 16.

A final note: garden outreach to the larger community

While the community gardens provide unique and important benefits for gardeners, and while members of the surrounding community access similar benefits by interacting with the garden and its gardeners, many South Enders remain largely uninformed and unaware of these spaces and the value they hold. With high rates of residential turnover, it is probable that a substantial proportion of the larger community walk by with little attention to the gardens, their communities, or their histories. For SELROSLT and the individual community gardens, the failure to reach out and draw in more of the surrounding community diminishes the ability of the gardens to generate support from the neighborhood. After almost four decades of steady gentrification, the community gardens of the South End now sit amid considerable wealth. SELROSLT has made some efforts to reach out to and seek financial contribution from its surrounding community, largely by sponsoring the annual South End Garden Tour. Featuring both private and community gardens, the self-guided tour both raises funds and provides a way for invites those unfamiliar with the community gardens to know them better. However, despite this successful event, the wealth and potential financial support the larger South End community remains largely untapped.

The unrealized potential of further integrating the gardens into the community in the South End also means that many in the larger community remain unaware of the value and stories they hold. As the community continues to change and newcomers continue to arrive, the neighborhood becomes more and more removed from its past. The community gardens, as the product of Urban Renewal and the activism that sprang up around it, are a connection to that past, and a symbol of how the neighborhood has healed from it. Said Betsy Johnson, “In the South End what happened was, in the 1980’s, the majority of people sort of actively involved in SENHI vividly remembered the difference between a weed-filled vacant lot, and the community garden, and how much the gardens had improved the neighborhood. Now a majority of South End residents don’t remember the vacant lots. They don’t *know* the vacant lots.” Telling the story of the gardens—through marketing efforts or other events that bring the larger community into the garden—could help to create a common story about where the neighborhood has been, and perhaps a common vision for where it is going as well.

Thus, as a part of the larger landscape of the South End, the Worcester Street and Rutland Washington gardens are a source of public benefit to those on the other side of the gardens’ fences. Although not always directly accessible to non-gardens, the case study gardens nevertheless provide a set of unique benefits not offered elsewhere in the public landscape of the South End. Some of these benefits are similar to those provided by other types of open spaces and some are specific to use of the space as a garden. In providing these benefits, the garden functions both as a neighborhood amenity for residents or regular visitors to the neighborhood and as a point of interest to non-local visitors. For both groups, for the larger community overall, the presence of these unique open spaces offers a rare connection to both a living landscape and a living history. By recognizing, preserving, and developing the garden in the community, opportunity to make such connections are increased, and space to create new landscapes and new histories expanded.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion: The Garden in the Future

This thesis began with a summer day's walk through the South End and its community gardens and an ensuing set of questions regarding their development and present-day role in the life of the community. Turning the corner back to the street on which the walk originally began, we find ourselves at the entrance to the same garden that inspired this rather lengthy tour. Pausing before the sturdy-looking steel fencing and granite columns, we consider these questions again, in turn.

How did the community gardens in Boston's South End evolve to become permanently protected open spaces?

The community gardens of the South End, like those in other urban neighborhoods across the United States, began primarily as a response to the problem of vacant land. Post-war suburban flight and increasing disinvestment in inner-cities produced vacant parcels in many American cities. In the South End this condition was compounded by the Urban Renewal Plan of 1965, which systematically cleared a selection of the neighborhood's parcels of land. While some were redeveloped, many remained vacant, creating what was essentially a public land bank. With the parcels remaining, for a time, undeveloped, there emerged from several different sources the idea to use these vacant lots for gardening. Supported by local political leaders and a well-organized network of community-based groups, a grassroots community gardening movement began and soon created a number of gardens throughout the neighborhood. Having laid a layer of topsoil and put down roots, the community gardens marked their territory in the neighborhood.

However, they were still far from attaining recognition as an official type of open space. Indeed, at the time, the gardens were, by all legal accounts, a temporary use of land. The Boston Redevelopment Authority retained all rights to the gardens and could remove and develop the land otherwise at any time. Despite the lack of secure tenure, however, many of the neighborhood's gardens were allowed to remain throughout the 1970's and early 1980's. It was during these years that the gardens were built from the bottom up. For the two case

study gardens, the design and development process for these community gardens was largely undertaken by the garden community, and is one of laying out, amending, improving, and altering the various elements of the garden. Thus, despite their temporary status, the community gardens, through the incremental efforts by their garden communities and their sheer history on the land itself, moved closer towards recognition as a legitimate land use.

The on-going improvements to the physical form and infrastructure of the gardens were the result of the dedication and cooperation of the many garden communities. At the scale of the neighborhood, these garden communities, along with other garden advocates, made up a substantial gardening constituency. After years of building, improving, and advocating for community gardens, this constituency—led by key open space and garden activists—had developed into a formidable interest group capable of defending the legitimacy and logic of community gardens as permanent open space. Thus, when the question of what to do with the neighborhood's remaining vacant land arose during the South End Neighborhood Housing Initiative planning process in the late 1980's, the South End Garden Project together with the Boston Urban Gardeners had the evidence, intellect, and opportunity to successfully argue for the preservation of a number of the neighborhood's existing community gardens.

The BRA's decision to transfer eight parcels of city-owed land to the newly formed South End Lower Roxbury Open Space Land Trust was, by far, the most important step in the gardens' evolution as permanently protected open spaces. Doing so not only granted them legal protection, but was also a statement of the Authority's support for community gardens as an integral part of the neighborhood. The circumstances that allowed this to happen marked a rare moment in time where a set of intersecting interests realized preserving the gardens was good policy and good politics, for both the City and the neighborhood. However, it is important to keep in mind that, though ultimately the protection of the gardens depended on the BRA's decision as to whether or not to recognize them as a legitimate use of land, the evidence used to convince the Authority that they should be recognized as such came from the years individuals and groups had spent building and improving the gardens themselves. Thus, a community-led, bottom-up effort came to be recognized for the benefit

it provided to the larger community, and was, through the establishment of a community land trust, incorporated into the City's official open space inventory.

The journey towards recognition as official open space did not end with the transfer of the South End's community gardens to SELROSLT. Over the following decade and a half the community gardens of the South End joined larger efforts to protect these community open spaces. In 1994 SELROSLT, the Boston Natural Areas Fund (or BNAF, an organization formed in 1977 to protect urban open space), the Boston Urban Gardeners, and the Dorchester Gardenlands Preserve and Development Corporation (or DGP, a community land trust formed in 1977 in Boston's Dorchester neighborhood) joined in collaboration to form Garden Futures. The intent of this collaboration was to develop a long-term vision and plan for community in and around Boston.¹ With Betsy Johnson as director, Garden Futures eventually expanded into a collaborative of eleven non-profit organizations with some involvement with community gardens.² In 2002, Garden Futures and BNAF merged to form the Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN), primarily to strengthen Garden Future's ability to secure long-term financial support for community gardens.³ Several years later in late 2006, BNAN and the Trustees of the Reservations (TTOR), the nation's oldest regional land trust, joined in permanent affiliation to further their common mission of conserving open space throughout the Boston area.⁴

The association of BNAN—an organization that directly owns and oversees ownership of more than 250 community and school gardens throughout the Boston area, including those in the South End—with TTOR is a milestone in the evolution of community gardens as official open space. TTOR was established in 1891 during the era of Olmsted's country parks and focused primarily on preserving scenic natural areas outside of the city. At this time, the smaller parks and green spaces of urban neighborhoods were not yet an official type of open space, let alone community gardens. Though it took almost a century of advocacy, re-

¹ Rachel Dowty. David J. Hess, "Case Studies of Community Gardens: Boston Community Gardens," eds. David J. Hess and Betsy Johnson 2005, 2, <http://www.davidjhess.org/BostonCG.pdf> (accessed 9 December 2006).

² Ibid.

³ Betsy Johnson, interview by author, Boston, 8 December 2006.

⁴ David A. Bryant, "Boston Natural Areas Network Joins Trustees of Reservation in Permanent Affiliation," Trustees of the Reservations Press Release, 13 September 2006.

evaluation, and above all, community initiative, eventually these small, urban spaces—including community gardens—became recognized and officially-sanctioned elements of open space systems. Standing at the entrance to the garden, we now understand how these once informal “guerilla” gardens came to be permanently protected, official open spaces. With the gate once again open, we move into the garden itself and onto the next question.

What is the present-day role of the South End's community gardens for both gardeners and non-gardeners?

It was not long after I had wandered into the world of community gardens that I learned that the very thing that makes these spaces so interesting also makes them difficult to study. Community gardens are many things at once, playing different roles and holding different meanings for a variety of users. As the previous discussion shows, community gardens are on one level an open space resource. From both the perspective of the community in the garden and the garden in the community, they provide benefits similar to other types of open spaces: views from both the street and abutting residences, spaces for sitting and relaxation, a break in the concrete and pavement and opportunity to connect with natural elements, and a sense openness in the urban landscape. Besides the value they provide as open spaces, community gardens are also sources of unique benefit and value that stem from their function as a garden. In addition to the obvious benefit of providing an opportunity to garden in the city, gardeners value the community garden for its social function – the opportunity to meet and get to know people in the garden community. As has been shown in previous research, because the community garden is a place where gardeners share resources and is also the site of other communal activities such as cookouts, fundraisers, and garden improvement projects, they are frequently places of social gathering and interaction. In this way, community gardens are often as much about community as they are about gardening. For non-gardeners, the benefits of community gardens as gardens include the opportunity to observe and learn about the practice of agriculture and to receive vegetables and flowers from gardeners.

However, these community gardens, both as community open spaces and as gardens, hold even deeper and more unique meaning and value because of the neighborhood of which they

are a part – the South End. Like most community gardens, the gardens of the South End are shaped by the historical and cultural conditions that surround them, and as a result, hold a unique set of shared meanings and identities for their gardeners.⁵ In the South End, these shared meanings and identities stem largely from the larger neighborhood’s shared history and present-day value of diversity. This shared history and value is realized in the community gardens because of the broad appeal of the activity of gardening and the diversity of the South End neighborhood itself. Gardening is an activity that is accessible to people from a wide variety of cultures and backgrounds. The South End, due largely to earlier efforts to establish a high proportion of subsidized housing, combined with the more recent middle and upper-class gentrification, accommodates a relatively diverse array of residents. As a result, community gardens in the South End are—like the surrounding neighborhood—considered exceptionally diverse by their gardeners and are valued as such. Here, the community gardens are seen as a *reflection* of the positive qualities of the surrounding community. Additionally, community gardens are places where this diversity is *engaged*; people of different backgrounds interact with each other through their common interest in gardening. This function was regarded as especially meaningful to the gardeners interviewed for this thesis as such interaction is seen as rare in the neighborhood’s other public or meeting places.

The ability of community gardens to reflect and engage diversity, a valued quality of the surrounding community, is part of the gardens’ larger role as both microcosms of and models for the communities around them. As demonstrated in “The Community in the Garden,” the case study gardens reflect the qualities and dynamics of the surrounding neighborhood both physically and socially, in this way acting as a microcosm for the larger community. While this may reflect the community’s positive qualities, such as diversity, it also reflects the conflicts and tensions in the community. At the same time, the community gardens, as microcosms of their surrounding community, present the opportunity for their garden communities to engage with that tension and conflict and to mediate and forge solutions for

⁵ Troy D. Glover, “The Story of the Queen Anne Memorial Garden: Resisting a Dominant Cultural Narrative,” *Journal of Leisure Research* 35, no. 2 (2003), 193.

it. Thus, the community gardens in this study acted as a venue for community problem-solving, and in this way are a model for what the community could and perhaps should be.

From our viewpoint within the community garden, it is now clear that these open spaces play a unique and—in the particular context of the South End—vital role: they are one of the few public places where people of different backgrounds may truly interact. In a neighborhood such as the South End, where diversity is realized more by physical proximity than interaction and relationship, community gardens are valued as one of the few places in the public landscape where people of different backgrounds get to know each other. This interaction is not always smooth and amicable; indeed, tension and conflict abound. However, this is also part of the value of these spaces. They allow for contestation, mediation, and reconciliation of difference. As a testing-ground for fundamental community processes, they are rare and invaluable assets to larger communities like the South End.

Having assessed the role of these community gardens from both the perspective of the community in the garden and the garden in the community, we now come to the final question along this neighborhood journey: *What considerations must be given to developing and sustaining new community gardens as a permanent element of city design? How do we build and nurture the garden in the future?*

The community gardens of the South End, as some of the first gardens in the country to receive permanent protection as open space and as gardens that have been incorporated as neighborhood amenities in more recent development, hold valuable lessons for the design, development and management of new community gardens. “The Garden in the Community” demonstrates some unique considerations that should be given to improvements to existing gardens and development of new ones.

Visibility

One of the unique opportunities community gardens provide is for the community *around* the garden to both passively observe the activities of and to further engage with the community *in* the garden by interacting with gardeners. Therefore, the community garden itself should

remain visible from other public realms, namely the street. This recommendation, however, may conflict with market-driven pressure to develop community gardens on land that is less-centrally located and therefore less visible. With this in mind, locations that provide some visibility but leave the most valuable parcels free for development are most appropriate for the development of community gardens.

Self-governance

Because much of the value of community gardens is a result of their function as communities unto themselves, it is important to establish a structure that allows each garden to remain a largely self-governing organization. While a larger, umbrella organization is crucial for the purpose of advocacy, outreach, and administering common tasks, allowing each garden to shape its own course is important nevertheless. It provides room for the gardens to develop unique appearances and characters that reflect the qualities of their garden communities. In this way, the element of self-governance adds to community gardens' unique value as a community open space.

Stable public support

While community gardens benefit from the opportunity to manage their own affairs and are, by and large, capable of meeting many of their own needs, sustained provision of basic infrastructure of the gardens from the City or other municipal department remains necessary. The community gardens need on-going provision, repair, and replacement of their common infrastructure such as fences, plot dividers, and, most importantly, water sources. Additionally, they require services such as trash collection and compost delivery. Providing these basic materials and services regularly allows garden communities to focus on managing financial, organizational, and minor physical aspects of running a community garden. In addition, basic infrastructural support helps the gardens maintain their appearances, and thus allows them to be better members of the surrounding community.

Aesthetics

Because community gardens *are* a part of a larger community, community gardens, as an official type of public open space, should be subject to some sort of aesthetic criteria. These

criteria may cover general upkeep and cleanliness issues such as keeping the garden and surrounding area free of trash and removing snow from abutting sidewalks, as well as more subjective aspects of the gardens' appearance such as signage, fencing, and maintenance of a vegetative border. The scope and content of these criteria should be determined through a process involving both City officials and members of the larger community, particularly ones that influence aesthetic criteria for the larger neighborhood, such as the Boston Landmarks Commission in the South End. As with determining any criteria for the built environment, the process of deciding such criteria will potentially involve conflicting ideas about what the garden, and the neighborhood, should be or look like. However, if the greater issue is the acceptance and sustainability of the garden, these are decisions that must be made.

Public outreach

Because most community gardens are enclosed by a fence and gate and do not appear as accessible as many other types of open space, there is a greater need to institute a program of public outreach to involve more of the non-gardening community in the garden. Public outreach may benefit community gardens or gardening organizations financially by providing a larger base from which to draw donations. Additionally, involving the larger community the garden may allow greater communication of its history and present-day role and meaning. This is especially important in changing and gentrifying communities like the South End where there persists the need for a common ground upon which to bring people of diverse and increasingly disparate backgrounds together. Though community gardens in other neighborhoods may not play the same or even a similar role as the South End's gardens, the potential for enhanced community connection that the gardens provide is an asset from which any community would benefit.

Flexibility

A final consideration that should be given when designing community gardens is attention to the future of the space if the community's interest in gardening wanes and there are no more gardeners. If the garden ceases to exist, then certain benefits will be lost. However, if the space continues as some sort of open space that is designed, built, and maintained by the community, whether a park, a playground, or even a forested area, many benefits will

remain. Therefore, it may be most useful, when considering the provision of community gardens in new development, to think of the gardens as flexible open space. While, community preferences may request space for gardening today, as the community changes, there may be new needs and new requests necessitating that the space must be able to change. What should remain, however, are the processes of self-determination and self-governance by the community in and around that space. While the act of gardening is unique and is important to the success of community gardens as community open spaces, in the end, it is gardening's ability to build community that truly determines the success of that space. If other uses result in similar community cohesion, then they too are suitable and beneficial uses for a flexible, community open space.

Building Community in the Garden in the Community: areas for further research

This investigation of the development and present-day role of community gardens in Boston's South End suggests areas for further research on community gardens and community open space in general. Building upon the idea of flexible community open space, there is a need for more case studies of such spaces, with particular attention to both their physical design requirements, as well as best strategies for implementation and sustainability. In addition to further research on *new* community gardens and community open spaces, this thesis indicates the potential for applying community-led management and maintenance of open spaces to existing municipal parks and recreational facilities. While size and location pose obstacles to the potential for community management of some open spaces, smaller, neighborhood-based parks and playgrounds that are currently under public management could transition to a community-based strategy. As this thesis shows, this type of strategy has the potential to function as a vehicle for community development as well as result in better management and maintenance of the open spaces themselves. Therefore, additional investigation of previous efforts to make such a transition and proposals for new strategies for existing open spaces would make a substantial contribution to the research and literature on community gardens and community open space.

In addition to the need for more research on the application of management strategies evidenced in community gardens to other public open spaces, this thesis suggests the

potential for using the ability of community gardens to foster inter-racial, -class, and -lifestyle “bridging” to build community in new residential developments. This is particularly promising for the development of mixed-income housing which places people of different economic, and often racial, backgrounds in close proximity but may not provide a venue for their interaction. Further research of the potential for integrating gardening space into mixed-income developments, and strategies for their implementation and management, could contribute to the development of housing policy for mixed-income and integrated communities.

Finally, because community gardens are a relatively new type of open space, understanding and articulating their full value—including both tangible and intangible benefits—requires on-going research. Therefore, there is a need for more in-depth, site-specific study of community gardens. Additionally, this thesis indicates the need for further research into the role of community gardens in changing—particularly gentrifying—communities. Because many gardens were created to address the problems of low-income communities, when these communities begin to gentrify and the average wealth of residents rises, the need for sustaining the community gardens may come into question. At the same time, these are the very communities that could most benefit from the tendency of community gardens to promote relationships across divides of race, class, and lifestyle. Community members, government officials, and policy-makers need to be aware of this unique potential when faced with the decision of whether to develop community garden space or preserve it for continued community use and benefit.

Closing remarks

From the outside looking in, the community gardens researched for this thesis may seem at best a modest contribution to the urban open space system. Far from Olmsted’s great parks whose physical plans were to affect millions and transform society, the community gardens of the South End are relatively humble patches of cultivated ground whose form is more a reflection of the gardeners that made them than any grand design. However, though at their inception few believed these community gardens could have a transformative effect on individuals or society as a whole, their vernacular form and bottom-up function has proven to

be just this powerful. The source of this power, however, is derived not from their dimensions or details, but from the communities that build, alter, contest, reconcile, and maintain them. Pat Hynes, reflecting on her journey from first becoming interested in community gardens in an academic setting, to researching and writing a book about them, and finally becoming a gardener in one herself, said, “I might have thought when I did the book that the garden had its own power and magic. But now I see that really a garden is really only what its gardeners are. And also if it has an impact beyond its current gates and if its doors are open.”⁶

The community in the garden in the community is just that – a community. Its ability to create, expose, teach, and heal through the benevolent and restorative act of gardening can be a grounding force for our ever-changing neighborhoods, cities, and towns. It falls upon planners, designers, and shapers of the urban realm and its communities to create spaces within which these miraculous processes may unfold. Through this thesis, I have attempted to convey this process and its power. However, in the end, the exposition inevitably falls short. The full value of community gardens is almost impossible to articulate. To truly understand them one must go inside and experience, cultivate and connect. And so, I end with a final, deceptively simple and yet crucial recommendation for those who wish to understand and develop the community in the garden and the garden in the community –

Join one.

⁶ Hynes, H. Patricia, interview by author, Tape recording, Boston, 7 February 2007.

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APPENDIX A

Contemporary Literature Review of Community Gardens

This literature review focuses on themes most relevant to the study of community gardens as an open space resource in Boston's South End neighborhood. Because community gardens have been researched most extensively for the benefits they provide their users, this theme comprises

the majority of the literature reviewed. However, two lesser themes also relevant to this thesis are also reviewed. One is on conflict that results from dynamics both internal and external to community gardens, and the second is research on the value and meaning community gardens hold for both gardeners and non-gardeners, and their overall role in the neighborhoods of which they are a part.

Much of the contemporary literature on community gardens has focused on the range of benefits they provide to their users. These benefits may be categorized as either tangible or intangible, with the former referring to benefits that are measurable within a scientific or economic framework, and the latter referring to benefits of a personal, cultural, and societal nature that require qualitative evaluation (Harmon and Puntney 2003). The tangible benefits of community gardening are well-documented in the literature. For many gardeners community gardens are a source of inexpensive food and are therefore an economic resource with the potential to lower household expenses (Hynes and Howe 2002; Schmelzkopf 1995; Wagner 1980). H. Patricia Hynes, in *A Patch of Eden: America's Inner-City Gardens*, estimates a fifteen by fifteen foot garden plot can yield up to five hundred dollars worth of food in a growing season (Hynes 1996). Research also proposes community gardens provide economic benefit by supplying food to urban dwellers without reliance on fossil fuel-based transportation (Linn 1999). Community gardens also provide the tangible benefit of neighborhoods beautification (Jamison 1985; Schmelzkopf 1995) and are seen as a quick, inexpensive, and accessible way to revitalize an area of a neighborhood (Hynes 1996). It is important to note that most of this research has been done in the context of lower-income communities where inexpensive, fresh food and neighborhood beautification make the most notable impact. Intangible benefits of community gardening include both personal benefits—improved mental health, relaxation, exercise, and general sense of well-being

(Hynes and Howe 2002)—and benefits that affect a larger community of people. Because the focus of the thesis is on community aspects of community gardens, the literature review will concentrate on research that explores this civic-related aspect of community gardening.

Community gardens are places where gardeners share resources, such as tools, water, and space, and where most of these resources are managed by the gardeners themselves. They are therefore places where gardeners must work in cooperation towards a common goal. Additionally, the establishment and operation of community gardens often entails other communal activities such as fundraising, cookouts, and garden improvement projects (Glover 2003). In this way, community gardens are often places of social gathering and interaction (Landman 1993; Linn 1999), and are often as much about community as they are about gardening (Glover et al 2005b). Benefits for gardeners related to the social aspects of community gardening include providing a greater “sense of community” and a sense of connection to both the community garden space and the neighborhood (Schmelzkopf 1995; Shinew et al 2004). Beyond a general sense of connection to community and land, community gardens have been investigated for their “democratic effects,” or whether they instill in their participants a sense of civic commitment or duty or “political citizenship.” This research found that time spent in the community garden correlated positively with extent of political citizenship of its gardeners (Glover et al 2005a). Community garden researchers, noting the potential of community gardening activities to empower its participants and encourage them to become involved in other civic engagements, have also proposed that expanding the network of community gardeners can contribute to the building of a more democratic society (Linn 1999). Additional research on the social aspects of community gardens has found that relationships built in the garden space may lead to further socializing outside of the garden space (Glover et al 2005b). Thus, facilitating social gathering, interaction, and networking both within and outside of the community garden space has been demonstrated to be an intangible benefit of community gardens.

Research has also explored the potential of community gardens to promote interaction between normally disparate groups within a community. While this potential has been given mention in both scholarly (Jamison 1985) and popular work (Swezey 1996), it has rarely

been the subject of empirical research. An exception is a study by researchers in the field of leisure studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, who examined interaction among people of different races within urban community gardens (Shinew et al 2004). The study—which involved telephone interviews with fifty-three African-American gardeners and 128 white gardeners in the greater St. Louis region—found that community gardens are perceived as spaces in which people of different races can successfully integrate, and that African-American and white gardeners tended to agree that community gardening brings together people who would not normally socialize together. Though this study presents evidence that community gardens can promote interaction between people of different races, their potential to foster interaction across other social divides such as class remains unexplored. Also, most of the literature on community gardening has focused on its benefits to low- to moderate-income communities, and there has been little attention to the changes in social function these spaces may affect in more affluent or gentrifying communities. Therefore, the social role of community gardens in a wide range of community types, with particular attention to their ability to “bridge” gardeners from diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds, warrants further attention.

Besides being a source of benefit, some community gardens have also been found to be the subject of conflict. Conflict in community gardens stems from sources both external and internal to the garden. Gardens can become spaces of land use conflict when real estate values increase and pressure to put the space to a more financially profitable use intensifies. With urban redevelopment increasing in cities across the country, this phenomenon has seen coverage featured in the popular press (Gowda 2002; Madsen 2002) and has received some attention in academic circles as well. A study of community gardens in Manhattan’s Lower East Side found that community gardens provide numerous social, economic, and health benefits, but are contested spaces that play out the tensions between the desire for community garden space and open space in general, and the increasing pressure for housing (Schmelzkopf 1995). Besides the potential for conflict as a result of external forces, conflict due to internal garden dynamics—for example, tensions over ethnic or racial differences—has been mentioned in the literature (Schmelzkopf 1995), but has not been the subject of focused research or analysis. Additionally, there has been no exploration of the conflict

between different groups within the garden and similar conflict in the larger neighborhood. A community garden provides an ideal setting to explore conflicts within a gardening population and also how this conflict does or does not reflect the dynamics of the larger community.

A final area of research on community gardens with particular relevance to this thesis is that which has focused on documenting the overall meaning and value of community gardens as part of the public open space landscape for both gardeners and non-gardeners. Research at the University of California, Davis, in a comparative investigation of an adjacent city park and community garden in Sacramento during 1982-85, found that the concept of “garden” had different meaning for residents of the area than “park” (Francis 1987). Non-gardeners held an understanding that community gardens were cared for open spaces and attached value to them because of this even through they were not the direct users of the space. Further research argued that that urban community gardens may hold a deeper meaning than professionally designed and maintained open spaces because people become directly involved in their design, building, and maintenance (Francis 1989). Additionally, this study proposed that gardens are a significant source of public open space in cities, and thus provide benefits to both gardeners and non-gardeners alike. Though this research provides evidence for some of the value and meaning of community gardens, because of the ever-changing nature of these open spaces there is an on-going a need for further investigation into the role community gardens may play in urban neighborhoods and city life.

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APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

Background information

- How long have you lived in this neighborhood, and what brought you here?
- Occupation/age
- How long have you been gardening?
- Why did you get a plot here? Why do you continue to garden?
- Why might you stop gardening here, or elsewhere?
- What do you grow in your garden?
- What are your earliest memories of the garden?
- Can you describe the changes you have seen in the garden?
- [If there were changes] What do you think were the causes of these changes?

Personal activity patterns

- What months do you go out to the garden?
- How does gardening fit in with your daily routine? (e.g., relationship to work, residence, etc.)?
- Do you have any private outdoor open space (backyard, balcony, roof garden, etc.) here or in another place (2nd homes)?
- During the gardening season, how often do you visit? How long do you stay?
- How would you describe the kind of time you spend in the garden?
- [If a longer-time gardener] How have your feelings about the garden changed from when the garden was just beginning?

Social role of garden

- Describe other “types” of people that garden here?
- What is *your* social involvement with the garden like?
- Do you think the social atmosphere in the garden has changed over time?
- Have you found that the relationships you build with other gardeners extend outside of garden?
- Do you ever see/hear of conflict or disagreement in garden?
 - o If so, what is the source of this conflict or disagreement?
 - o How is it resolved?
 - o Can you specifically describe one instant or incident of conflict or disagreement?

Non-gardener involvement

- Do you think people who don't have a plot in [case study garden] feel that the garden is open to everyone, that it's “theirs” too?
- Are there ways to be involved in the garden without having a plot?
- How do new people get a garden plot?
- Do people who are not gardeners ever walk through the garden? Are they ever curious about the garden, ask questions, etc.?
- Do you hear people complain about the garden? Why?

Future of gardens

- Do you think any of the garden spaces are threatened?
 - o If so, what do you think is threatening them?
- What are some other challenges you see facing the sustainability of the gardens?
- Do you have any thoughts as to solutions to some of these problems and challenges?

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