

Proposal for the Gordon Neighbourhood House Herb Garden Expansion

Introduction

Foods on average travel a distance of 1300 - 2000 miles in the States, which contributes to a large ecological footprint (ATTRA, 2015). Packaged herbs contribute plastic waste and are expensive for certain people (personal communication, 2015). With herb gardens scattered all over the West End of Vancouver, we can reduce food miles, food waste, and most importantly, strengthen community engagement.

Gordon Neighbourhood House is located in the vibrant and highly populated community of Vancouver's West End. It provides a variety of programs that are food-related, making use of existing herb gardens. GNH strives to make use of the neighborhood's resources (i.e. useable spaces) and provide free herbs to the community. The aim of the project is to increase the accessibility of the herbs by expanding new herb gardens, increasing community engagement, and improving food literacy. Our project objectives are to identify potential spaces for building new herb gardens, to increase the usage of the herb gardens, and to compile our research findings into a booklet to share with the community in an effort to improve food literacy.

Inquiry questions

How to make the sites more accessible to people?

How to make the herbs more accessible to people?

How would the herb gardens improve community engagement?

How would the herb gardens improve the food literacy of a community?

Background and significance

The West End Community Profile describes the West End of Vancouver as “vibrant, diverse, walkable” and as housing a “densely populated community” (2012). Located downtown, the neighbourhood is made up of 204 hectares enclosed by West Georgia Street, Burrard Street, Stanley Park, and English Bay. Within its boundaries lies Davie Village, a hub for the LGBTQ

community, Denman Street, a commercial area, and more high-end retail on Robson and Alberni Street. It is a mix of public green spaces, commercial areas, and residences.

The 2011 census states that the neighbourhood houses 44 543 people or 7.4% of the city's population. It is the fourth most densely populated region of Vancouver. This population is relatively young with 48% being 20 - 39 years old versus 34% in the rest of Vancouver (City of Vancouver, 2012). The West End's demographic is unique in that its percentage of age groups is stable when compared to other areas of the city. In other words, groups of people of the same age arrive and leave about every five years

In terms of food assets, the neighbourhood houses a number of community gardens as well as places to buy food such as a seasonal farmer's market (EatLocal, 2015) as well as more conventional retail grocery stores

According to the American Community Gardening Association, having a city garden serves as a resource to empower social interactions within a community, be environmentally conscious, reduce hunger, provide a source of nutrition, increase food literacy and most importantly, build a sustainable community (Holmer et. al, 2007). GNH understands the significance of having herb gardens as they provide access to gardens for people living in mid or high rise buildings who otherwise wouldn't have any and provide a sense of community inclusiveness.

Block et al (2011) states that food literacy is composed of three components: "conceptual or declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge, and the ability, opportunity, and motivation to apply or use that knowledge" (p.7). This means that the actions and knowledge of the people will affect the food security of the urban community (Teng, Escaler & Caballero-Anthony, 2011).

Research Methods

The first step of our data collection was the meetings with Susanna Millar, the Lead Farmer of the GNH Urban Farm, who is currently managing the herb gardens. Through the first three meetings, we were able to collect information on the operations and work involved for the herb gardens. We determined that the tasks could be divided into two parts: new site hunting and

marketing for the herb garden program. We plan to collect both qualitative and quantitative data for our research.

	Quantitative data	Qualitative data
New site hunting	For all potential sites in the West End community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sunlight exposure time • size of land field available to use • maximum height allowed for the herbs to grow 	Interview the stakeholders and the landowners to understand their needs and the accessibility of the sites to the public
	<u>Data interpretation:</u> use a descriptive table including all the aspects to present to community partner, allowing them to critically evaluate the strengths and the limitations of each site	
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • size of each current herb garden site • area available for the advertisement posters and handbooks • exact location and ways to access each current and potential site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the function, cultural background of all herbs and ways to harvest them. • Informally interview local community members to understand what they want from the herb gardens
	<u>Data interpretation:</u> process the data collected in a form suitable for marketing (eg. posters, booklet, and brochures)	

The main ethical issue for our project would be that we have to make sure to be as non-invasive and non-pressuring as possible when seeking permission from landowners to build a garden on their land. We'll also make sure to keep our community partner apprised of our progress to ensure their continuing approval.

Success factors

We will determine our success according to feedback from GNH community programmers and stakeholders.

Possible criteria for a successful evaluation may include:

For marketing:

- Are the signs and handouts well-designed, simple, informative and attractive?
- Does our community partner think the sign encourages more people to feel comfortable about picking herbs from the garden?
- Are the books well-designed, and informative?
- Do the books include basic information about herbs, the correct methods of harvest and the usage of herbs?
- Does our community partner think the handouts could let more people know about GNH's herb garden?
- Do our community partner think the handouts can encourage more people to come by and harvest herbs?

For sites:

- Are we able to find the expected number of qualified sites?
- Did people respond to our letters?
- Do stakeholders express an interest in participating?

References:

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