White Lake Community Garden

2025 Year-End Report

Presented to Whitehall City Council

October 28, 2025



Grow with us. Open to all.

Overview

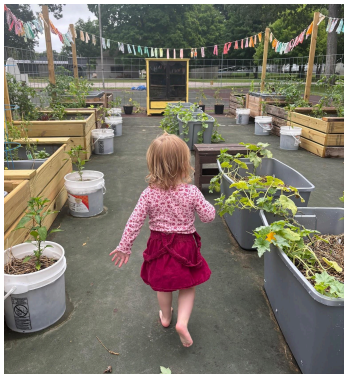
The pioneer year for the White Lake Community Garden has been astonishing. The entire garden was constructed in a week's time and over 20 different types of fruits, veggies, and herbs were able to be grown, harvested, and shared with the community throughout the growing season. Support has been provided by the Whitehall City Council, upwards of 25 volunteers throughout the season, 9 local businesses, and numerous individual donors, which allowed us to create and maintain a garden that hosted diverse events for the community, with over 90% of survey respondents sharing that they believe the community garden made a positive impact on the community this year. We look forward to growing the White Lake Community Garden in 2026.

Community Events Recap – Summer & Fall

Community build days - Work days in early summer to build and plant the garden for the year. The entire garden space was built in one week thanks to over 10 volunteers and donors.



Lighthouse Learning Center Daycare Field Trip - Toddlers from the Lighthouse Learning Center in Whitehall, MI took a field trip to the garden. They helped us water, learned about the plants and pollinators in the garden, and even taste-tested a few plants (~10 toddlers and 4 adults in attendance).



Sips & Sprouts - Free barista-style coffee at the garden, provided by the Sundazed Coffee Co. mobile coffee bar based out of Ann Arbor, MI. This event brought approximately 25 community members to the garden and we were able to show the progress we had made by mid-summer.







Donor and Volunteer Appreciation Dinner - Dinner at the garden organized by Amber and Ann to thank the many generous donors and volunteers throughout the summer. Approximately 30 donors, volunteers, and local supporters shared the meal and conversation together.





Salsa Making - Hands-on event to make salsa at the garden with local veggies both from the community garden and some generously donated by Schultz Farm in Montague. Over 20 community members learned how to make fresh salsa thanks to this event.

White Lake Community Library Good Neighbor Dinner - Mint iced tea, with mint grown in the community garden, and table decorations made by a community garden volunteer, were provided for over 75 community attendees.



Vanquish the Vampires - Garlic planting and Fall clean-up at the community garden around Halloween. Around 12 community members ensured that the vampires won't return for another year.



Bi-weekly garden meetings - We hosted meetings open to the public to discuss all things related to the garden. Discussion mainly revolved around reflection on past events, upcoming harvests and events, and the direction of the garden. This season, there have been 10 bi-weekly meetings, with meeting frequency to change to weekly over the winter to prepare for the 2026 growing season.

Key Event Takeaways:

While most of the events had sizable turnouts, the events with the best turnouts were free or low-cost events that allowed neighbors to meet in a welcoming environment. Next year we will continue with this theme to organize more events that promote community engagement.

It is also noted that each event had a diverse crowd of attendees. Although there were several repeat core attendees, there were quite a few new faces at each event, which demonstrates that the events were continually interesting to a wide population. This will be a focus for our 2026 event planning.

Donations & Support



The support from the surrounding community for the first year has been incredible. It is estimated that over $2,500 of material were donated in addition to the $1,000 provided by the City of Whitehall. Only ~$185 of the city's $1,000 support has been used this year to ensure funds are available to support a strong start in 2026. Major contributors from the community were Weesies Brothers Garden Centers and Landscaping, Gill-roy's Hardware, Standard Lumber, Affordable Fencing, Walmart, as well as numerous individual contributors.

Looking ahead into 2026, there are already seven potential collaborations in the works and three major donors that have discussed possible contributions, such as excavation of the tennis courts at Whitehall City Hall and fencing options - pending approval from Whitehall City Council.

Volunteers

Through the various build days, events, watering, and general support, we have had over 25 community members volunteer their time, skills, and physical labor to make the garden a reality. Based on the survey results, we have an additional 40+ community members that have expressed strong interest in volunteering next year. They offered skills ranging from advanced gardening experience and grant writing expertise to marketing and general construction.

Several local community gardens also offered their advice and time with our volunteers to show how they organize and operate. Leadership at the Community Food Forest Collective of Maryland met with our volunteers to discuss non-profit incorporation advice as well as lessons they have learned.

Community Survey Results

Building the garden with the community - not just *for* the community - is a major goal of our organization. We believe the community garden needs to reflect the vision of the community and the first step towards achieving that is to listen to their voice. A survey was drafted to collect feedback on the overall impact of the community garden, vision for the future of the space, and community volunteers' skills they are willing to offer to help achieve this vision. We distributed the survey at all of our events, on the Facebook page, door-to-door at homes near the community garden, and at tabling events at the Artisan Market Village in Montague throughout the month of October. To date, 56 responses to the survey have been collected and it will remain open through the winter to solicit more feedback while we plan for the 2026 growing season.

The community showed a very positive response to the garden with 90% of survey respondents sharing that they believe the community garden made a positive impact on the community this year. We only received one negative survey result regarding a different vision for the land use. In addition to the overwhelmingly favorable reaction, over 40 respondents indicated that they are interested in volunteering their time and skills to bring the garden to life next year and provided their contact information.

The most common theme from all survey responses was to increase the size and diversity of the garden, with a strong focus on native plants and minor interest in pumpkins and fruit trees. Many responses also highlighted the need for more

benches or seating, which will be critical for an expansion. Private plots were also of interest and will be considered as we move into the planning phase for 2026.

There was also a sizable amount of responses that wanted to see more education and skill building events/classes throughout the year. Example classes include: seed starting, propagation, preserving seeds, and hands on beginner classes. There was also a suggestion to include signage on how to engage with different plants, such as how to harvest, prune, and water.

Many responses noted the strong desire for more community events and want the space to serve as a hub to meet neighbors and create stronger connections with others.

All responses, good and bad, will be considered as we begin working on the 2026 Planning Report. By directly leveraging the community's feedback we will be able to start 2026 strongly with the 40+ additional volunteers that have offered help.

Website Launch

Our new website (wlcgarden.org) will soon be live! It will have basic information at the beginning with more details coming this winter including:

- Event calendar
- Organizational mission, values, and gardening philosophy
- Event photos
- Event RSVP/signups
- Donations
- Surveys
- Newsletter signup
- Private plot leases
- Contact information

The website is intended to serve as the primary stop for all information regarding the White Lake Community Garden and will improve communication, simplify event sign ups, and provide more information about who we are and what our goals are as an organization. Hosting, website creation, and Google suite are all being provided to us for free from a generous donation of two members of the community (sponsorship to run on an on-going basis).

Pending Non-Profit Status

The White Lake Community Garden intends to become a non-profit by early to mid 2026. This will allow us to apply for grants, accept monetary donations, and give us tax exempt status. We have reached out to two friends of the garden who have experience incorporating non-profits and they have provided a list of resources to get us started as well as their support through the founding process.

Closing & Gratitude

The White Lake Community Garden truly would not have been possible this year without the support of Whitehall City Council, our many volunteers, and our generous donors throughout the community. Keep an eye out for the 2026 Planning Proposal in early 2026 which will outline our goals, expansion plans, and all things necessary to kick off next year's growing season.

Community spaces are essential for the future generations.

- White Lake Community Member

