

## **Everybody Eats Municipal Community Garden Pilot Proposed by Commissioner Mariah Parker, District 2**

### **What is it?**

Housed under Leisure Services, the Everybody Eats<sup>1</sup> community garden pilot will transform a blighted property in the pilot community of East Athens into a communal space for active, collective recreation and life skills development. Neighborhood youth will be employed as apprentices to help manage the garden, recruit volunteers to take part in garden programming, and assist in managing the food box program whereby community members receive a box of fresh vegetables every week. If successful, the program can be scaled and replicated within this and in other underserved neighborhoods.

### **Why do it?**

#### **Public Safety: The Threat of Blight and Benefits of Communal Space**

In his book *Palaces for the People*, Eric Klinenberg outlines how transforming blighted properties into public parks, particularly community gardens, in neighborhoods with elevated levels of crime has manifold public safety benefits. Blighted properties can often become sites for drug use, defacement, criminal refuge, littering, and trespassing, and diminish *perceptions* of safety and public pride. In transforming these run-down spaces into colorful, productive, communal ones, residents begin to value their community more and are then less likely to disrespect it with criminal activity. Indeed, a study of blighted property remediation in Philadelphia showed a drastic reduction in crime in areas the city had converted from abandoned buildings into pocket parks.<sup>2</sup> Further, collective outdoor recreation in spaces like community gardens can improve social cohesion and individual mental health, which in turn support improved behavioral health.

#### **Public safety: Youth Social and Life Skills Development**

Youth development is the most frequent refrain I hear when I speak with members of the community. Employing youth to help manage a community garden diminishes the attraction of crime by providing youth constructive social relationships, financial stability, and the opportunity to give back to their neighborhoods, bolstering a healthier pride in place than criminal activity can offer. Additionally, skills attained through these apprenticeships strengthen resumes and can be applied to future entrepreneurial or agricultural efforts as well as personal home gardens, all of which set youth staff up for long-term financial, physical and social health. The proposed model also leverages the grassroots community connections of youth employed in the program to attract other youth volunteer participants, who benefit from life skills development and constructive community-building as well.

#### **Food security: “Give a man a fish, he eats for a day...”**

Food insecurity affected approximately 16% of Athenians even before the pandemic, and our community’s pandemic-related relief efforts have largely focused on food support. However, food distribution programs do not promote self-sufficiency or transform the underlying conditions that lead to

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<sup>1</sup> The program is named after Ke’Travian Cole, aka EBE (Everybody Eats) Montana, a twenty-year-old native of East Athens who was fatally shot on May 1st, 2021.

<sup>2</sup><https://www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/how-pocket-parks-may-make-cities-safer-more-healthy/31764/>

food insecurity. In addition to “giving a man a fish” by supporting families with fresh, locally grown food each week, a community garden offers members of the community the opportunity to “eat for a lifetime” as they learn agricultural skills that are transferable to home gardens and become empowered to provide themselves and their families with inexpensive fresh food, creating more disaster-resilient communities for the long term.

### **The Public’s Asked For It**

Transformation of a blighted property (three, actually) into community gardens is among requests for investment in the East Athens area identified in a petition signed by dozens of East Athens stakeholders and circulated to the mayor and commission on September 13, 2020.

### **How would it work?**

The pilot first requires the county acquire and remediate a blighted property near the Nellie B. Community to turn into a community gardening space.

Under the supervision of an experienced program coordinator, preferably from the pilot community, the garden would employ four young people from the neighborhood as apprentices to help lead the gardening efforts, including grassroots community outreach to recruit neighborhood youth to learn and work in the garden, identification of 15-20 families to receive no-cost, weekly food boxes, and application assistance for these families. Application for the food box program would entail verification of income levels below 30% of the area median income to ensure no violation of the gratuities clause, if necessary.

An additional 15-20 households could be invited to buy into the food box program at market rate and/or sponsor boxes for other families in the neighborhood to generate revenues to sustain the project.

### **Quantified impact:**

1 new “pocket park” created to beautify blighted neighborhood

4 youth and one adult community member employed at a living wage

15-20 youth and/or community volunteer participants taught gardening skills

30-40 families served fresh produce

X amount of operational costs recuperated through market rate food box subscriptions (TBD)

### What would we need?

Capital	Amount	Total
Land acquisition and remediation <sup>3</sup>	\$100k (one-time expense)	
Partnership with <a href="#">UGA Food Shed</a> program for usage of tools, seeds, seedlings, compost	In-kind donation	
Raised bed construction, including half ADA accessible beds <sup>4</sup>	\$4500 (one-time expense)	
Drip irrigation system	\$750 (one-time expense)	
	<b>Capital Subtotal</b>	\$105,250
<b>Operational<sup>5</sup></b>		
Apprenticeship wages (4 x \$15/hr x 15hr/week x 6 mo)	\$21,600	
Coordinator position (\$18hr x 30hr/wk x 6 mo)	\$13,000	
Utilities (water)	Estimated 40 gallons water/week? -- Cost TBD	
Miscellaneous supplies (rewashable gloves, outreach supplies like printing, staples, tape)	\$2000	
	<b>Operational Subtotal</b>	\$36,600 (minus utilities for now; does not account for potential revenue generation)
	<b>First Year Total Estimate</b>	\$141,850

<sup>3</sup> [The SPLOST 2020 Greenspace Acquisition project](#), whose description includes “developing facilities to expand local food distribution and funding equipment used for natural area restoration” may be a source of funding for this item, drastically reducing the costs to come from the general fund.

<sup>4</sup> Repurposed, untreated wood could be donated from CHARM to help build raised beds, reducing these capital costs

<sup>5</sup> Allowing time for site selection, acquisition, zoning and remediation, staffing costs would not kick until during second quarter of FY22