

# **Hill East Community Garden**

## **A History**

### **The Good Ole Days**

Once upon a time a garden and gathering spot was established in an alley parcel in the eastern end of Capitol Hill, formed by the diagonal intersections of C Street, D Street, Massachusetts Ave and 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> streets SE. The old time neighbors of today recall a bounty of vegetables, shared harvests, and many children growing up around the backyard lights that frame the parcel.

### **The Bad Ole Days – 1980s/1990s**

As the years passed by, Washington, DC suffered an economic decline, a crack epidemic and crime sprees. Residents' fled to suburban enclaves, making for a decline of families with young children the neighborhood experienced its own related challenges. The alley parcel became abandoned, and eventually taken over by the unsavory elements of weeds, trash, drug paraphernalia and use, gambling, abandoned vehicles etc.

### **Hopes and happier times – (early 2000's)**

The new millennium brought a housing frenzy to DC, with rapidly escalating property values, home sales and rapid turnover. New buyers, as well as old-timers breathed fresh life into their homes. Neighbors new and old forged a friendly alliance, beginning to share memories, experiences and hopes. Some old-timers longed for the good ole days of gardens and neighborly chats over the backyard fence, but no longer had the physical energy. Some new neighbors were eager to contribute to and strengthen a vibrant and close urban community. The alley parcel became quiet, most days, but still remained an eyesore.

### **A Community Garden is Born**

One of the first meetings was held at Mike and Jennifer Fowlers house on D Street SE in fall of 2003. The potluck drew about 25 neighbors, discussion centered on outreach to neighbors abutting the potential new garden, establishment of membership, rules etc.

## **Significant Accomplishments**

### **2003**

- Name for the community garden, “Hill East Community Garden” founded.
- Letter of intent to create and maintain a community garden submitted to Capitol Hill Community Garden Land Trust (CHCGLT). (Appendix I.)
- Permission letter to use the land received from Greater Washington Mutual Housing Authority (GWMHA). (Appendix II.)
- August, first meeting by interim board held to establish rules, bylaws, membership etc.
- September, passed out flyers to neighboring homes for a get together to discuss the garden and gauge interest of potential members.
- September, field trip! Went to Kings Court Community Garden (KCCG). Pat Taylor introduced us and showed us around their garden. We looked over plot layouts, common areas, watering and generally getting to know other gardeners in the area.
- Mike and Jennifer Fowler developed plans for 36 4' X 12' garden plots, common space, and a simple garden fence.

- Legislation introduced to DC Council to have the parcel turned over to CHCGLT. (Appendix III.)

## **2004**

- Flyers distributed to abutting neighbors to join the garden.
- Site Preparation and Fence committees were formed to gather ideas on how to implement clearing the site, putting in plots and erecting a fence.
- Lot cleared of vegetation, trash etc.
- Fence plotted off and erected.
- Plots and common areas marked off and built out. Patio using old recycled brick put in place.
- First year of gardening: 24 plots with 41 members.
- Received 2 grants: Greater Recourses of Washington (GROW) for \$1,000.00 and \$1,500.00 from Capitol Hill Association of Merchants & Professionals.
- Valentine and Lucie Anan supplied the water and kept the water barrels filled through the growing season.

## **2005**

- Second year of gardening: 27 plots with 48 members.
- Flyers distributed to abutting neighbors to join the garden.
- Elections for board members were held for the first time. Three new members: Catherine Jouet, Jenn Comey and Victoria Dunning were elected, and with Roger Attkisson and David O'Brien from the current board.
- Unfortunately, the use of old recycled bricks did not hold up through the winter. It was decided that a new, safer patio was needed and passed by the membership. Separate donations from members, with left over funds in the treasury were used to purchase new brick pavers and were professionally installed.
- Compost bin installed.
- Legislation passes for CHCGLT to acquire the property for use as a community garden.
- Special thanks to Valentine and Lucie Anan for supplying water and filling up the water barrels throughout the year.

## **2006**

- Third year of gardening: All 36 plots with 59 members.
- Flyers distributed to abutting neighbors to join the garden.
- February: Membership meeting and elections held. Two new members elected to the board: Lucie Anan and Marc Olano.
- New water system: New barrels, hoses and connections were installed so that water could be provided by a close neighbor.
- Water supplied by Lucie and Valentine Anan
- Pathways and common areas were lined with weed stop fabric and wood chips to cut back on weeds.
- Closing on property occurs between GWMHA and CHCGLT. (Appendix IV.)
- HECG working with a law firm on pro bono basis, to submit paper work with IRS and DC government to become a 501(c)(3) (non-profit) organization. (Appendix VI.)

## **2007**

- Fourth year of gardening: 36 plots with 61 members.

- February: Elections held with 3 new members joining the board: Rochelle Woodard, Heather Nawrocki and Rebecca Hunt.
- Membership meeting held with Lorin O'Toole of D.C.'s Department of Environment and Ed Bruske and Susan Harris of DC Urban Gardner's to discuss issues about safe gardening and pest control.
- Shed purchased and built for common garden tools and supplies.
- Compost delivered. Garden members asked to amend their own plots with compost for the upcoming growing season.
- Woodchips delivered. Had first major garden work day: weeding was completed in common spaces, paths and perimeter of garden; compost added to perimeter spaces and wood chips and fabric spread in common areas and path ways.
- A pH probe was purchased for the garden. Additionally, soil test kits were ordered through the DC government.
- The Greening of the Garden committee planted a number of additional plants along the perimeter, including coreopsis and cornflowers.
- Because the garden was full and people were still interested in becoming members, some current members volunteered to be paired with a waitlisted gardeners to share their plot.
- A website was created.
- A checking account for HECG was created.

## **2008**

Fifth year of gardening: 36 plots with 57 members.

Board Members: Rebecca Hunt (President), Claire Sale (Vice-President), Donna Sickler (Secretary), Erin Harms (Treasurer), and Heather Nawrocki (Garden Coordinator).

The work around the garden continued. Two works days took place, which opened and closed the garden. The spring workday was delayed a week due to rain, but the fall workday carried on as schedule. Two ad-hoc workdays were scheduled in order to try to tame the patio. Other methods to control weeds included using vinegar with water, and corn gluten.

Vegetables including okra, tomatoes, and herbs were planted around the perimeter of the garden for neighbors to enjoy.

Interest in the garden kept growing. By June, there were seven wait-listed gardeners, two of whom were sharing plots with existing gardeners.

In order to make it easier for the Board and gardeners to track work hours, the Garden implemented an online log for work hours. This way, reminders can be provided to people who, at the end of the year, still have some work hours to fulfill.

Liz Hall took the lead on creating a pumpkin patch on the eastern side of the garden, where compost bins had been. Although the project started a little late to enjoy pumpkins before the frost, the patch generated a lot of interest.

## 2009

Sixth year of gardening: 36 plots with 57 members.

Board members: Claire Sale (President), Liz Hall (Vice President), Donna Sickler (Secretary), Erin Harms (Treasurer), and Nicole Shank (Garden Coordinator).

The Terms of Membership for the garden changed to accommodate a wider definition of “work hours.” Because it was determined activities other than strictly garden maintenance benefited the garden community, activities such as attending board meetings, planning a social event, or planting things in the common space would count toward work hours.

Additionally, the Garden also revised the Terms of Membership to state that the commitment for work hours is tied to plots, rather than the individual primary or secondary gardeners. The requirement is four hours per plot, rather than per member.

The Capitol Hill Community Garden Land Trust (CHCGLT) has begun its efforts to separate itself from King’s Court Community Garden. This became even more important as CHCGLT has a new member: the new Green East Community Garden one block south.

The Board identified ground cover as a particular challenge for 2009. A committee was established to investigate possible solutions and mulch was eventually delivered and laid down in the spring during a workday.

### **APPENDIX I. Capitol Hill Community Garden Land Trust**

The Capitol Hill Community Garden Land Trust (CHCGLT) along with the Kings Court Community Garden (KCCG) an alley parcel along 14<sup>th</sup> Street, 15<sup>th</sup> Street, C Street and South Carolina Avenue SE with leadership from their President Pat Taylor aided in the effort for HECG to become the community garden it is today. With their help we were able to raise funds and begin the building of HECG. It was also decided early on, that the legislation for the property would go through CHCGLT and be held by the land trust as it was already established to do this function for and take on other abandoned properties to construct other community gardens. Mary Beth Iler their treasurer, worked with HECG in depositing/disbursements of funds. Lisa Schwartz Ogle was instrumental in obtaining getting the permission letter to use the property from Greater Washington Mutual Housing Association (GWMHA) and introduce the legislation to the DC Council with then Council Member Sharon Ambrose to have the property transferred to the land trust and forgive all back taxes.

### **APPENDIX II. Greater Washington Mutual Housing Association**

The parcel was officially deeded to Greater Washington Mutual Housing Association (GWMHA) a nonprofit dedicated to affordable housing (they received in 1994 from the Boys and Girls Club via an individual in 1989), which had received the property as a donation. Still with no viable zoned use for an alley parcel, GWMHA was amassing a sum of back taxes and clean city fees. The first step was getting the use of land approved for the HECG. This was done under the auspices of the CHCGLT, and with the goodwill and great connections of Lisa Schwartz Ogle. Lisa made contact with GWMHA and presented the plan to take over the property and introduce legislation to forgive all back taxes and clean city fees and have the land transferred to CHCGLT. After much consideration, GWMHA finally came through with a letter granting HECG to use the property and begin the process of having the land transferred.

### **APPENDIX III. A Bill**

In 2003, legislation was introduced to the DC Council by Councilmember Sharon Ambrose. Lisa Schwartz Ogle was instrumental in contacting and help write the bill with councilmember's Ambrose office. As usual with all things of DC, the legislation moved slowly thorough the process as other matters of the city came beforehand. But finally in October 2006 the legislation was passed for the use and enjoyment of a community garden and specifically those members before and now of HECG.

### **APPENDIX IV. Land Transfer**

Land transfer proved a bit more elusive, both as the DC Council's legislation pertaining to the garden's temporary status and pursuit of land transfer, and GWMHA representatives proved difficult to pin down for signature. Again, Lisa Schwartz Ogle played a role on keeping us on the good (and lawful side) of Council. David O'Brien stewarded the 501(c)(3); Catherine Juoet stewarded the land transfer as well as the title & deed.

### **APPENDIX V. 501(c)(3)**

The non-profit status, (501(c)(3)) approval proved easier and just slightly shorter than the land transfer. With the help of founding member David O'Brien, HECG was fortunate to have the pro bono legal services of Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver, and Jacobson LLP, in this regard. With bylaws, an active board of directors, and operating in the community good, HECG

achieved its official 501(c)(3) status in 2007. Its rotating board of directors continue to manage HECG business and operations each growing season.