

**Avant Garden Community Design Charette**  
**Saturday March 14, 2009 - Barnes Elementary School**  
**Burlington, VT**

Design Session Minutes from 3/14/09

**Present:** Jen Berger, Denise Quick, Greg (BACG Site Coordinator), Micha, Noah Pollock, Mark Krawczyk (Charette Leader), Julia Kirk (Charette Leader), Karen Paul (City Council Member-Chair, Arts, Parks & Culture Committee), Maggie Leugers (Superintendent of Recreation, P&R Dept), Dilbar Temirov, Chris Beneke, Sascha Rodriguez, Kel Rossitor (BACG Board Member), Maggie Standley (Design Charette Coordinator and Avant Garden Neighborhood Liaison). (Minutes submitted by Maggie Standley).

## **I. Welcome**

Mark and Julia welcomed all. Mark was excited to discuss ideas about permaculture and encourage a cross-pollination of ideas for this new public site. He explained that permaculture is a holistic approach to using design to create healthy, functional, and sustainable eco-systems. He noted the importance of taking into account how the site fits into the neighborhood and the different functions it will serve for the city, gardeners and neighbors.

(Side Note: Mark and Julia are professional designers who generously offered their time and expertise in leading this session. To prepare for it, they gathered background information/took site photos, created base maps, and put together an invigorating plan for this afternoon.)

### **A. Introductions**

Mark invited everyone to introduce themselves and explain what brought them to the workshop. There was a variety of responses ranging from Jen Berger wanting to learn more about gardening opportunities in her neighborhood, to Denise Quick, who teaches design at CCV, and has collaborated on other city projects such as the rain garden down in front of the Coast Guard building, to Kel Rossitor, who is a recent BACG Board member representing the Myrtle Street Avant Garden, and excited to have a place to garden in his neighborhood.

## **B. History & Background of 17 Myrtle Street**

I gave a summary of how the public garden came to be-A small group of neighbors joined forces when we learned of an impending house going up on the open lot on Myrtle Street. The owner was approached, who to everyone's surprise, was willing to sell without building on it. We submitted a proposal to the Conservation Legacy Program Fund Committee in hopes of procuring grant funds for a purchase to conserve the lot for public use. After an arduous process but with the help of many including, volunteer residents, city officials, community leaders and land conservation experts, we succeeded in saving it. Thus, it is now owned by the city, and BACG, a division of the Department of Parks and Recreation, is the partner organization for the Avant Garden Neighborhood Association, providing oversight and management.

## **C. Overview of Charette Process & P&R's Site Design**

Julia gave an overview of the process and outlined the agenda. Mark suggested that to start, we take a look at the city's design brought by Maggie Leugers from P&R, for all to keep in mind throughout the session.

Maggie Leugers spoke of the success of the city's community gardening program (BACG-Burlington Area Community Gardens) and gave background as to how the Tommy Thompson garden came to be part of P&R and what an amazing man Mr. Thompson was. She said the site spoke to P&R's mission encompassing productive leisure and beauty.

Everyone looked at the design and a few people asked about things such as soil test results, how many plots there would be and if there would be raised beds. Maggie Leugers believed soil testing had been done, but was unsure if the results found the presence of lead contamination. She stated she didn't expect there to be raised beds and said the number of plots was up in the air. Several people commented on welcoming a handicapped accessible plot.

## II. Group Brainstorms

To start off the next part of the design session, we looked at aerial photos as well as ground-level photos from a projector. We also looked at and discussed a map outlining the various natural elements and how they impact the site, such as wind, water, slope, viewsheds, noise, pollution and sun. We reviewed a base map that Mark had created as well.

### A. Needs/Yields Analysis

Mark and Julia described a “Needs/Yields Analysis” as:

A design strategy to minimize work and maximize productive potential by assessing the needs and products of both the site and the people involved and then looking to see how the yields of one could best fulfill the needs of the other.

We began with a ‘needs’ analysis of the community, focusing on function as opposed to form. Participants were asked:

1. What Functions Does the Garden Need to Serve? (What are the needs of the community?) The following list was generated:

- Relaxation
- Food Production
- Wildlife Habitat
- Gathering Place
- Growing Fruit
- Tool Storage
- Reduce Run-Off
- Composting
- Education
- Play Space
- Public Art Space
- Music Space/Cultural Space
- Food Sharing/Gleaning Space

Participants were then asked to brainstorm around the questions of:

2. What Maintenance and Oversight Does the Garden Require to Thrive?  
(What are the needs of city maintenance officials and the garden itself?)

- Garden Shed
- Ready for Growing Season (May 24 – Oct 17, 2009)
- Healthy Relationships with the City
- Lawn Maintenance/Lawn Alternative
- Tidy Appearance
- Shared Responsibility of Site Maintenance
- Water-both access to and attention to
- Respecting Gardeners' Space and Respecting Neighbors
- Border Boundary
- Vehicular Access

3. What Specific Elements Would People Like To See The Garden Provide?  
(These results are from participants present on 3/14/09)

- Garden Plots
- Fruit Bushes/Trees
- An Inviting Entrance
- Circular Picnic Table
- Benches
- Open Space for Passive Recreation
- Rainwater Garden to Mitigate Run-off

4. What Elements Would Youth From Barnes Elementary School Like To See The Garden Provide? (These results are from children at Barnes who Maggie Standley has been working with in terms of garden design/creation. Their ideas were on display during the workshop).

- Garden Plots
- Fruit Trees
- Swing Set
- Basketball Court
- Swimming Pool
- Ice Skating Space
- Play Space
- Wishing Well

At this point we took a break for snacking et al. before a garden site-visit.

### **III. Avant Garden Site-Visit**

We walked to the garden on Myrtle Street and were fortunate to have a fairly warm and very sunny day.

Mark encouraged the group to observe the site without analyzing it or making design decisions.

We noted:

The path of the sun (essential at the vernal equinox) and the shady/sunny spaces and microclimates that result; the prevailing wind sector from the west; the very gradual slope of the land from a high point in the southeastern corner down to the lowest point along the neighbor's driveway on the western edge of the property; the location of neighboring structures, considering how the garden may impact their privacy and property, the potential for rainwater collection off the neighbor's garage to the east, the need for clear access into the garden that doesn't trespass through the neighbor's property to the west and the existing and exposed viewsheds in all directions. Additionally, we observed existing vegetation and perimeter garden beds, the recent water installation and the waterlogged soil that surrounds it.

We discussed these observations and returned to Barnes to put our collective goals and site analysis to use.

### **IV. Putting All This Info Into Designs**

We worked together on drawing several scale designs taking into account the city's design. Our primary focus was to see how we might appropriately maximize the use of this small space while paying respectful attention to the maintenance needs, goals and budget of BACG and P&R. We remarked that some space in P&R's design is devoted to pathways and thought about how we might make more effective use of this, noting that while the space is 2704 square feet (52' x 52'), the current design plans include a maximum garden bed area of 600 square feet (15 plots at 40 square feet each). Thus with good, conscious design, we could still offer the same number and size of community garden plots while also serving other community needs.

We discussed the idea of incorporating curves into the plan as opposed to straight lines. Most people were enthusiastically supportive of the idea to create an upper terrace (about 6" high) in the southeastern corner of the property, making use of the natural slope of the landscape. This creates a more dynamic space that feels larger and acts to invite people in to this passive recreation area. It could be as simple as an arced 2x6 retaining wall. This terrace could serve as the site where a garden shed could be located, along with 2-3 dwarf fruit trees and shrubs to create some shady cover along with the existing benches to invite conversation amongst neighbors.

Several individuals also noted that a rain garden might be an appropriate design solution along the west boundary, where there is an existing low spot that receives runoff from the neighbor's driveway. This would be full of flowering plants that attract an array of insect life. Also, as a way to help designate the western property boundary without erecting a fence, we considered planting out an edible hedge (also known as a 'fedge' – a food producing hedge). This way rather than creating a distinct boundary between the two spaces, we're actually sharing yields and building a bridge of connection. This might include berry bushes, raspberry canes, hazelnuts and other small shrubs that provide forage and habitat for wildlife and may deter them from the garden plots.

Access is a crucial aspect of a well functioning garden and we all agreed that functionally (and in good neighborliness) it made the most sense to place an entry gate along the northern fence line of the property (along Myrtle St.). (As indicated in P&R's design) This would create an inviting, functional entrance that doesn't require gardeners to walk across the neighbor's yard. We also considered the need for P&R to have vehicle access to the site and determined that this gate could be built to also accommodate a pickup truck if necessary.

It seemed to make sense to keep the perimeter of the property planted in flowers and perennials, as is already in place, as a buffer from road pollution and traffic and considered the planting of a few dwarf fruit trees (plums, peaches, pears, pawpaws) strategically along the edge to increase the diversity and productivity of the site.

We recognized the potential for the site to serve as an educational space for the neighborhood and to also draw visitors to it, creating signage that explains some of the innovative techniques and species that have been incorporated into the design. After all that, the rest of the parcel remains for community garden plots.

We also discussed the collaborative aspect of the design/site as well and though we didn't reach any conclusions re this because P&R needs to weigh in, we considered connecting with a local, like-minded group like Burlington Permaculture or the Grow Team ONE to organize a rotating group of volunteers to manage the perennial portions of the garden that serve the wider community. We discussed as well that it would be crucial to share these ideas with the gardeners at this new site, of whom three (I think) were present, and have them contribute.

In addition, several participants offered to volunteer their time to realize some of these design ideas if approval is forthcoming from the city.

It was a very fruitful final process, all taking place in only about 45 minutes.

## **V. Closing & Action Steps**

We concluded a productive afternoon and decided on next steps. I was to compile minutes (herein enclosed) and find out the correct procedure for sharing these design ideas with the city/P&R for their review and feedback as to how this correlates with their needs for the space.

Mark and Noah said they would be happy to continue working on the designs started today and solidify several of them, and would be in touch re a possible presentation of them.