

Unique Garden Engages Communities of Color

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ers are anxious to promote health, wellness, and cultural enrichment in the African and African American communities.

"Community members expressed a strong desire to have increased gardening space, affordable, culturally relevant fruits and vegetables, and to engage in community gardening as a means to decrease social isolation," said Charlene McGee, one of the organizers of the Urban Harvest Garden who also serves as board president of the African American Women's Coalition.

Work began on the once vacant lot of 741 N. Beech St. and Albina

Avenue in February. Owned for over a decade by the local Urban League, the space was first covered with cardboard, dug up, re-soiled, and prepped for spring planting. This month, community members gathered to resume hammering, shoveling, and planting.

"We want to give people a chance to garden, especially those who wouldn't normally be able to," said Kyle Weismann-Yee, a communication associate for the Urban League. "On a tight-budget, it's hard to buy locally grown, organic foods at the supermarket."

The goal is to plant healthy, fresh foods that are favorites to the local African American and immigrant African populations. The space

should provide sufficient room for up to 30 families to plant and harvest their produce.

On the recent planting day, volunteers young and old dressed to get dirty and shoveled dark, rich soil atop raised garden beds and rows of earth. Community elders helped young ones drop seeds of baby green lettuce, sweet onions, tomatoes, collard greens, sweet potatoes, okra, leek, chard, and more.

"We want the community to utilize this plot, especially African-American people, said Inger McDowell, head of the diversity and civic leadership program of Urban League of Portland.

McDowell continued, "It is important that we make it

intergenerational, a common space for youth and elders to build toward something."

Mapping out designs for the garden, including a wooden fence and a structure to hold six giant rain barrels to collect water for irrigation, was Ty Schwoeffermann, the Portland Urban League's health equity organizer, who learned to garden from his Caribbean mother.

"She was around plants her whole life, so she taught me a lot and had us working in the garden," he said. Schwoeffermann also has experience from a former job at a molecular biology lab in Eugene where he learned the under workings of growing corn.

Just as important as the passing

of cultural values and information from one generation to the next, is the principle of recycling and regeneration.

Volunteers tore apart recycled crates donated by the Rebuilding Center for the wooden planks that would make the fence.

Though some funding was made possible through the partnership of the Urban League of Portland and the African Women's Coalition, most of the materials needed for the project were donated or recycled.

The project received tools, tips, and information about gardening from the Urban Farm Store, shed equipment from Northeast Tool Shed, and bark dust from the city's forestry department.



Ask Deanna!

Real People, Real Advice

An advice column known for reality based subjects!

Dear Deanna!

I loaned money to my girlfriend's husband and now he won't pay the money back. I did this personal favor without talking to my friend first. He is now telling me to stop harassing him or he's going to accuse me of trying to sleep with him. I've been sending him e-mails to call along with text messages and I've called his cell phone. I thought I was doing the right thing by not mentioning the loan. How do I get my money without jeopardizing my friendship? --Miss CeeCee; Atlanta, GA

Dear CeeCee:

It's to your advantage to go ahead and write the money off unless you're willing to bring drama in your life. If there's no promissory note or paper trail indicating you loaned the money and it would be paid back, you're stuck. You're being blackmailed and it's going to get worse. Tell your friend about the loan, stop looking for payment and whatever happens in their relationship is not your fault because you chose to be honest and have integrity.

Dear Deanna!

My mother stayed friends with my wife after our divorce. My ex-wife cheated on me, placed me in debt and wrecked another man's family. My mother is still holding on to her because my wife was the daughter she never had. I have no use for this woman and wish my mother would do the same. We are arguing more and more and the family is starting to divide. How do I make my mother understand that she needs to let go and move on? --Stressed Out; Pittsburgh, PA

Dear Stressed Out:

A divorce is like death and there must be a grieving period before moving on. Your mother had an emotional attachment and family bond with your wife. It's true that spouses don't marry the family but your case is an exception. Your mother has forgiven her for the pain and you should talk to your mother and seek healing. If your mother is happy and no harm or disrespect is coming your way, leave it alone and let things run its course.

Dear Deanna!

I left a relationship twice and each time I went back. After each separation my boyfriend promised he would change by not drinking, not chasing women and would help around the house. It took a month or so before he went back to his old ways. I feel the third time would really be different because he's crying, offering to get saved and begging really hard. What ground rules should I give him if I go down this road again? --Michelle; Jackson, MS

Dear Michelle:

Give him a map with directions to alcoholics anonymous, a Bible to show him the way of life and a phone number for a good counselor. If this relationship is going to be successful, he needs to work on his issues before trying to be with you or anyone else. After he makes the commitment to himself, you should support him and re-build your friendship. Only time will tell if he's sincere and if he sticks to the plan for a while, it's worth a shot.

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Power Seat

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the other members have been there a long time."

Born in North Dakota, Baugh's family moved to Oregon when he was two, and lived in several cities. He graduated from Astoria High School and the University of Oregon, earning a degree in Political Science. He has lived in Portland since 1991.

The Planning and Sustainability Commission's first assignment on formulating the Portland Plan is "extremely important," Baugh says. "We're planning for the next 25 years. There's no need to go further than the census to know that change is coming. This city will look different, and we have to plan for it. Our neighborhoods will change whether we want them to or not, but how do we preserve opportunities for the people who are there? It's hard work and messy, and I don't know one single tool to do it."

Preliminary goals on the Portland Plan include calls for economic prosperity (both by businesses and individual households), a functioning education system, and healthy, connected neighborhoods.

Over-riding all of the work is the concept of equity.

The equity goal, Baugh says, does not just mean providing for the poor or for disadvantaged minorities. It means that everyone has access to opportunities necessary to satisfy essential needs, advance their well-being and achieve their full potential. Or, as Baugh says, "How are we providing opportunities for growth for all of our residents?"

Equity also means ensuring that all neighborhoods, regardless of location or economic status, have access to basic services.

"For neighborhoods that

haven't had as much development in the past, we want to preserve the businesses that are there and foster growth, and provide opportunities for people in those neighborhoods to become entrepreneurs," he said. "Downtown is very important, but we also need healthy neighborhoods. There we start with small businesses, which are 80 percent of all our businesses."

Baugh brings credentials of his own to the issue of equity. He was among those who called the Portland Development Commission to task for failing to provide opportunities for women and minority contractors and construction workers.

More recently, as a consultant, he was the principal author of a diversity study which assessed the city's performance in this area.

"In the overall scheme of things PDC has done well," Baugh says. "They have the opportunity to do more. Have they made progress? Yes. Could they do more? There are opportunities."

Baugh also has expertise to contribute in the realm of transportation; he formerly served as a City of Portland transportation planner, and was project manager on the redesign of Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

"We need to figure out how people, wherever they live, get to

jobs and other services," he says. "One size doesn't fit all neighborhoods."

The Planning Commission has been a respected sounding board and regulator on land use decisions, but appeals and even greater decision-making power rests with City Council, and sometimes the Council has pushed the point.

Recently the Commission recommended that Portland Public Schools be required to go through complex land review processes to change grade levels at schools. Mayor Sam Adams took the unusual step of ordering the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability to submit recommendations more to the school district's liking, effectively pulling an end run around the Planning Commission.

Baugh says he is not bothered by such treatment.

"Council is the final authority," he says. "They're elected, we're appointed. Clearly we want to bet it right, but we understand it's their right to say, 'We think it could be done differently.' We could do a better job of explaining our decisions to Council, how we got there. But we're not 100 percent right."

In the Portland Plan, to make everything fit, Baugh says, "We need to hear from a lot of people, including those who don't normally show up for processes such as this, and make sure we listen to everyone and consider their viewpoints. Hopefully, we'll come up with a complex answer."

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