

Cultivating Gardens

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ceed the supply because of limited space, as well as issues of funding.

Currently, there are 39 community gardens, which cover 19 acres, supplying plot space to residents in various locations. Although the program attempts to equally disperse them around the city, she said there are some clusters where demand is higher.

In parts of southeast and southwest Portland, there is often a wait list, which can be up to three years.

In an effort to increase access, Portland Parks and Recreation have joined forces with community partners to open 1,000 new plots by the end of the year as part of City Commissioner Nick Fish's Climate Action plan created in 2009.

Five new gardens will open this spring.

According to Niemi, geographic equity was a central focus of the 1,000 plots initiative, so they began to look into areas that were on the outskirts of the city, including outer northeast, areas north of Lombard and east of 82nd. She said the program looked especially close at the areas east of



PHOTO BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Community Gardens Program Coordinator Laura Niemi and Parks and Recreation employees Shane Crone and Earl Straley oversee the construction of a community garden in northeast Portland.

I-205, which didn't have any gardens 10 years ago.

"So building the gardens was the first part of the strategy and having the service available for

nect with kids and families near the gardens with programs around healthy eating and active living," she said.

In north Portland, for example, a new community garden is going in next door to the new Clarendon building at 9235 N. Van Houten Ave., which was constructed last summer, she said. The grand opening is scheduled for Saturday, March 17, when residents will have a chance to sign up for plots.

But as more individuals from various walks of life have become more educated of the benefits from gardening, the demand increases, she said.

According to Niemi, when the Climate Action Plan was first created, the waiting list for community garden space was 1,000 people long.

She said Commissioner Fish wanted to focus on expanding the Community Gardens program to help meet that demand.

With more public gardens, community outreach, and education, the demand grows even higher as more people became interested and involved.

"Even though we have added over 600 plots, we still have over 1,000 people interested in gardening in the city of Portland," Niemi said.

She said it was especially hard to find community garden space in the areas of high demand because the land is expensive. "And we don't have funds to purchase new property, so our strategy for developing new gardens is to focus on the land we can utilize for free through agreements with property owners. "We also currently have 10 gardens on Portland Public Schools property."

While the program will certainly continue to add more gardens, they have also begun to make the plots smaller so more people can be involved, Niemi said.

"The other thing we have been doing is really developing our volunteer program to invite those who don't currently have plots to work and volunteer in the community gardens, so they can get involved with the neighborhood and connect with neighbors even though they don't have their own plots."

And although waiting lists are long, too many people wanting to garden is a good problem to have, she said. "I hope we can continue to expand so that everyone in the city of Portland has the opportunity to participate in a community garden if they want."

Currently, the city in the process of assigning new gardeners to 500 open plots, with another 325 new garden plots by the end of the year.

"I hope to continue to develop partnerships, so that we can ensure we are reaching diverse audiences and gardeners," she said.

people," she said. "The second part of the strategy is developing community relationships to help do outreach and bring people into the garden program that may not otherwise have participated."

One goal of the program is to ensure anyone who desires garden space will have access to plots near their home.

"We still have a way to go to make sure every part of the city is well served, but we are definitely making inroads," she said. "Community gardens can certainly help underserved community by providing a space for people to grow healthy organic food they otherwise might not be able to afford."

The gardens also provide an opportunity for families to get outdoors, participate in healthy activities and teach their kids to learn about the food they are growing and encourage a love of veggies, she said.

One way the program reaches out to underserved communities is through their partnership with organizations, such as the Immigrant Refugee Community Organization, which works with refugees and immigrants new to the city. "We have also worked with Portland Public Schools to con-

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Monday, March 19, 4:30-6:30 p.m.

Clackamas Town Center, Community Room,
Lower Level next to Management Office
12000 SE 82nd Ave.

Tuesday, March 20, 4:30-6:30 p.m.

Beaverton Library, Auditorium
12375 SW 5th St.

Wednesday, March 21, 4:30-6:30 p.m.

Portland Building, Auditorium
1120 SW 5th Ave.

Thursday, March 22, 4:30-6:30 p.m.

Multnomah County East County Health Center,
Sharron Kelly A & B
600 NE 8th St., Gresham

Tuesday, March 27, 5:30-7:30 p.m.

Multnomah County Library, North Portland Branch
2nd Floor Meeting Room
512 N. Killingsworth St.

Visit trimet.org March 15 for information on the revised proposal.

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