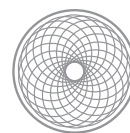


VIPIRG Research

Community Gardens on Brownfields: A Summary Report and Inventory

Prepared for: SPARC-BC and Greg Awai
Prepared by: Naomi Devine, Researcher

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Summary Report

Introduction

The Vancouver Island Public Interest Research Group (VIPIRG) was approached by SPARC BC in order to complete an inventory of community gardens on brownfields in Canada as part of the Community Gardens and Brownfields project. The project is led by SPARC BC and funded through the Centre for Urban Health Initiatives.

The scope of the project is driven by the fact that the practice of putting community gardens on brownfields is an emerging area. With limited research on the topic, an inventory of existing gardens on brownfields would provide an initial picture of the area in Canada. The inventory was designed to capture the following information on each garden: impetus for the project, date of creation, location (city, province), description of the brownfield site, funding sources for the community garden, budget for the community garden, how the garden is managed, number of plots, contaminants originally found in the soil, cost of clean up, clean up procedures used, and the sectors involved in the project.

Research was done in a cross-section of Canadian provinces, with the following cities examined: Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto, Hamilton, Montreal, Quebec City, and Halifax. Research was limited to urban areas. This report highlights key findings and themes that came up throughout the project and concludes with the matrix of community gardens on brownfields in Canada.

Methodology

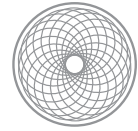
Data on brownfield gardens widens was primarily conducted via internet research, e-mailing contacts directly and phone conversations where warranted. Search terms used via internet research included: “brownfield gardens canada”, “community gardens on brownfields canada”, “community garden brownfield [city name]”, “community gardens brownfields”, “contaminated community gardens canada”, “remediated community gardens canada”, “soil contamination garden canada”, and “garden contamination canada”.

Research Matrix

An Excel spreadsheet matrix was created to summarize information gathered on each garden and has been appended to this report.

Definition of Brownfields:

The definition used in the project of a brownfield was as follows: “a brownfield is a formerly contaminated commercial or industrial properties that have been remediated and are



abandoned or underutilized". With certain legal exclusions and additions, the term 'brownfield site' means real property, the expansion, redevelopment or reuse of which may be complicated by the presence or potential presence of a hazardous substance, pollutant, or contaminant (EPA 2007).¹ This definition was given to contacts via email or verbally over the phone.

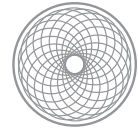
Key Findings and Themes

Initial internet searched did not turn up any web examples of community gardens on brownfields in Canada. Examples of gardens in the United States frequently appeared and were easier to access. When initial searches did not turn up any examples, research terms were refined and alternate terms to the word "brownfield" were used. Refined search terms did not reveal specific brownfield gardens in Canada. At this stage, in order to establish contact with gardens and gardeners, a search for community garden contacts in Canadian provinces was conducted and contact was established via e-mail and telephone.

From e-mail and phone conversations, the following findings emerged:

- Most gardeners were not previously familiar with the term 'brownfield'.
- Direct email contact revealed that in the cities examined, there are few, if any gardens on brownfields.
- The community (whether through an individual or community non-profit) is the impetus behind brownfield gardening.
- There is a interest on having more information on how to remediate brownfield areas to use as sites for community gardens.
- Gardens that are on contaminated soil are often not remediated due to cost, with raised bed gardening used instead and capping contaminated soil as the other option.
- All the gardens that fit the brownfield description are managed by the community or a group established by the community.
- All gardens, with the exception of the Dalhousie Women's Centre, have had other sectors involved with their garden.
- Some provinces and cities have well-defined networks of community gardens, making contact easy to establish. Other communities have little information on where such facilities exist.

¹ Environmental Protection Agency. *Brownfield Cleanup and Redevelopment*. Accessed June 12, 2007.
http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/basic_info.htm



- Many cities have someone on staff dedicated to community gardening issues.
- Further research would be necessary to determine the state of brownfield gardening in Montreal (see below for further information).
- From initial internet searches, there is more basic information around brownfield gardening in the United States.

Brownfield gardens were found in the following cities - Victoria, Vancouver, and Halifax. The Victoria garden is called the Rayn or Shine Community Garden, Vancouver gardens are MOBY (My Own Backyard), Strathcona Community Garden, and Cottonwood Community Garden, and in Halifax the garden has yet to be named and is known as the DWC (Dal Women's Centre) Community Garden.

The overarching theme is one of emergence - gardening on brownfields appears to be a new concept in Canada with interest from many gardeners and researchers across the country about techniques, locations of existing gardens and availability of space. Concerns were raised by some about the safety of gardening on brownfields.

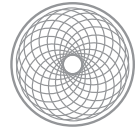
Two major centres stand out for the lack of brownfield gardens - Toronto and Montreal. Contact was established with the City of Toronto, Foodshare and the Toronto Community Garden Network. Contact with gardens in Montreal was done through the community garden Animators - those who are responsible for visiting the gardens and giving advice to gardeners. The City of Montreal has the largest community gardening program in Canada.² The number of community gardens in Montreal is now 97 with a total of 8195 allotments, and the program is run by a partnership between the City of Montreal and its citizens.³ Neither city, from the results of this inventory, has community gardens that are on brownfields as defined by this project.

The majority of the gardens in Montreal are on municipal land or on land slated to be developed. Internet research revealed that there are 5 gardens on former garbage dumps. This information came from news stories done when a community garden was shut down due to metal contamination in the food grown.⁴ The gardeners in this case were not aware that the garden was located on a former dump site. Tests are performed on the soil before a garden is built in the city, however the garden has been around about 22 years and it began when there was not the same level of concern about soil composition.

² City of Montreal's Community Gardening Program: Presentation to the World Urban Forum, June 2006.

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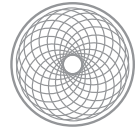
⁴ "Contamination Closes Community Garden in Montreal." CTV News story, Aug 20, 2006. Accessed at: <http://www.cityfarmer.org/MontrealCGclosed.html>



The Centre of Excellence in Brownfield Rehabilitation is located in Montreal and has a test garden, according to their website, however repeated attempts at communication were not returned.

There is a strong community building theme in the story of the gardens - the gardens in Vancouver have come about mainly due to community demand and the desire for increasing numbers of citizens to grow their own food. Community gardening in general appears to be on the rise. For example, conversations with the Community Garden Network of Edmonton and Area revealed that the number of gardens has grown from 3 to 60 in the past few years. The City of Montreal has seen steady growth in plots since the inception of their program in 1975. This increasing demand for garden spaces combined with development pressure in urban centres could provide an opportunity for brownfield gardening to grow.

Lastly, as the municipality is often a partner in the creation of community gardens on brownfields, questions around liability for the clean up of contaminated soil and health effects were voiced by some gardeners. Further research would be necessary to determine the extent of these concerns and if they were a sufficient barrier to brownfield gardening in Canada.



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References

City of Montreal's Community Gardening Program: Presentation to the World Urban Forum, June 2006. PDF document.

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Montreal Centre of Excellence in Brownfield Rehabilitation - www.cemrs.qc.ca/english