



"Bridging Landscaping Services, Green Collar Jobs, and Environmental Justice"

History of Our Gardens

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In 2003, tenants began to request the conversion of the unused lot behind the parking lot to a garden/recreational area. A number of issues were raised and discussed. What would it cost? Who would do the work, the maintenance? Can it be done safely? Would the general tenant population use it? A poll of the residents indicated that they wanted a multi-purpose space for picnics, play, and vegetable, herb, and flower gardening. Bids in 2003 and 2004 by landscape companies were prohibitively expensive. This is what the area looked like:



In 2005, the lot was turned over to the tenants for development. Some perennials were donated and the lock on the gate removed. A walk of the area disclosed a major problem. The green was mostly mowed weeds because the soil was subsiding between the bricks and rubble that filled where basements had been. A small area of shallow dirt was scraped together and a few vegetables were harvested. In the fall, the garden received a \$2,500 grant from Home Depot for the development.

In 2006, tenant Malcolm Nightingale scrounged neighboring lots for soil and material that could be composted onsite for plant beds. Clare Cardy planted seeds, and provided transplants and tools. Through a long summer of heroic work, we harvested quite a lot of vegetables from the poor soil. We did not have the Home Depot gift card available until fall. Contacting Greencorp Chicago raised the issue of unsafe contamination of soil by lead,

paints, and other toxic materials. We needed 12" raised beds to safely grow vegetables. We did get a number of City tulips and perennials given away through Greencorps.



In March 2007, several tenants attended the three Saturday seminars required for participation in the Greencorps Community Garden Development program. They gave us one day of a crew working to haul in \$800 of tested, composted soil to fill a temporary bed raised with free wood chips from the Chicago Department of Forestry. Our tenants Leon Dixon and Cristen Crawford with Clare Cardy had moved 110 cubic yards of wood chips into the lot for bed walls, paths, and to begin smothering deep-rooted weeds. Mr. Green planted seeds of several varieties of sunflowers, zinnias, and marigolds and gourds along the back fence. Flowers were planted around the parking lot and in two huge pots by the entrance.

After struggling through a drought in Spring and Summer, the L-shaped vegetable bed produced salad greens, tomatoes, huge squash, peppers, eggplant, green onions, Swiss chard, and a bumper crop of X-large cucumbers. Herbs were grown in three small beds and perennials started to bloom in 2008.

With the Home Depot grant, we purchased a Rubbermaid Garden Shed, tools, fertilizers, watering equipment, rolls of fencing, seeds, lumber for picnic tables, patio blocks, and paints to refurbish our grill. With a grant from Green Net Chicago we bought two sets of heavy-duty picnic table frames.



April 2008 brought Greencorps Chicago back to us with \$2,200 worth of cedar landscape lumber and augmented soil to create a 32x35 foot 12" raised vegetable area with a 32x4 ft 6" raised bed for herbs with a sloping ramp access. An additional generous raised bed was created for berry bushes and plants. This was three days of heavy but fun work for the cheerful crews, Clare Cardy and our new garden enthusiast, Ms. Sandy Kasprovicz coming from Orland Park to help. Already some salad greens, light greens, and green onions have been planted and the perennials lifted to make room for the bed are being put into permanent places.

Letters requesting donations were sent out to gardening companies, we've received boxes and packages of seeds and 40 Oriental Lily bulbs so far. Berry bushes and plants have been ordered.

Lots of projects still to be done to get our Back Yard Picnic and Garden area completed. Planting, watering, moving perennials, dumping gravel and patio blocks for the grill, sanding and painting the grill and building, and waterproofing the picnic tables and benches.

In 2009-2010 TRC worked with City Year, a nonprofit youth organization to build 3 bin compost system. Also, City Year assisted with a new sign for the garden. TRC expanded the garden adding more bed areas for herbs and fruit. Partnerships with the University of Illinois Extension Program Master Gardeners and Nutrition Programs produced a bountiful amount of training and resources for our participants. An innovative addition to our gardens is the Senior Village I Gardens. These gardens consists of a green roofing system

at this location and ground level organic gardening areas. We hope that all our gardens will be a center for sustainable community building, social interaction, learning, and nutritious organic food.



Green Roof Senior Village 2010



Green Roof Senior Village 2010



2010



2010 Compost Bins CITY YEAR



2010 Building Raised Beds University of Illinois Extension Program