

Strengthening Providence with Community Gardens

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Executive Summary

Studies have shown that gardening provides mental and physical health benefits. History has shown that during times of war and economic hardship, urbanites built victory gardens to sustain themselves with fresh vegetables. In this thesis I ask: does gardening provide a net return and if so, how can Providence use community gardens to promote an economically healthy city?

Previous estimates of the economic benefit of vegetable gardening for individuals range from \$80 to \$500 per season. I assess in this research the net economic benefit of a 2008 Providence community garden vegetable plot and compare the findings to two other kitchen gardens. I also measure public support and I use survey contingent valuation to compare the actual, monetary harvest value to the publicly perceived monetary value of a garden plot.

I conclude that community gardens provide a direct fiscal net benefit for participants as well as for the City, and I recommend the establishment of a Providence Community Gardens Network to lead the construction of new gardens. The harvest research finds that a Providence garden plot has an average monetary net value of \$100 while the net value could reach up to \$200. If a community garden has 100 plots, its net monetary value reaches up to \$20,000 per season or \$400,000 over twenty years. In addition to the direct net benefit to participants, the survey research shows that a community garden provides a median publicly perceived monetary value of \$35 per garden plot and the most common response of \$50 per garden plot. Again, assuming 100 plots, a community garden can thus provide up to \$5,000 per year or up to \$100,000 over twenty years. In addition to the monetary value of community gardens, they provide the City of Providence with deferred medical costs, increased property values, and low-cost green space.

My thesis research also assesses the public demand for more community gardens, finding strong support and an unmet need. To respond to this, I recommend that Providence and Southside Community Land Trust spearhead the development of a citywide Community Gardens Network whose role will be to identify neighborhood support and suitable garden locations, and to lead the building of community gardens through innovative and sustainable financial strategies.

