

Pull on your farmer hat! Urban agriculture as community development

Over the past few years, Twin Cities LISC and its partners have begun supporting urban agriculture as an important part of neighborhood revitalization. Community gardens and other agricultural initiatives not only help improve the nutrition and health of residents, they build relationships among neighbors and beautify the area.

St. Paul's East Side already has several community gardens. But the East Side's [Prosperity Campaign](#), which we support, believes the growth and maintenance of gardens is crucial to improving resident quality of life. The campaign is trying to bring community gardening to scale in order to achieve better community health and wellness—one of its four vision areas. But that's only one area of the Twin Cities bursting with green thumbs.

An urban farm in Saint Paul's most diverse community

In another St. Paul neighborhood in an area where we work—the Central Corridor—a nonprofit called [Frogtown Gardens](#) is striving to make the inner city neighborhood of Frogtown healthier and greener. They protect green spaces and gardens; advocate for sustainable development; dig, plant, and weed; and teach gardening for food.

Step by step, they're making good on some big plans—like planting dozens of trees for fruit and shade throughout the neighborhood. They've started a tree-planting program in collaboration with the St. Paul Parks' Forestry Department to increase Frogtown's tree canopy. Their summer-long Green Beaning of Frogtown project planted green bean vines on hundreds of fences in the community and culminated in a neighborhood Magic Bean Party in late August.

Their biggest dream yet is [Frogtown Farm](#). They're trying to create a sustainable, working farm as part of a future park on vacant land in the middle of Frogtown—one of St. Paul's most diverse neighborhoods.



Artist's rendering of Frogtown Farm

Right now, they're working to secure over a dozen acres of unused land at Victoria Street and Van Buren Avenue, for recreation space, nature trails, demonstration vegetable gardens, and picnic space. Frogtown Gardens agrees with hundreds of supporters that the community needs more green space, more places to grow fresh and healthy food, and new ways to bring neighbors together outdoors.

“We’re grateful to LISC for giving us our first sizable grant early on, when not much of anyone was taking us seriously,” says Patricia Ohmans, coordinator for Frogtown Gardens. Ohmans just received a \$75,000 Bush Fellowship to help lead that organization, and Frogtown Gardens itself was just approved for \$75,000 in funding from the City of St. Paul to plan the new park and farm.

New suburban garden in Hopkins

In the suburb of Hopkins, another area where we work, residents along the Blake Road corridor expressed a high interest in establishing a community garden as part of the expansion of Cottageville Park. In fact, the idea came from two residents who live near the park and was advanced by the [Blake Road Corridor Collaborative](#) (BRCC), a local community development effort funded in part by Twin Cities LISC.

The expanded park is being created on two acres of land south of the original park that was bought by the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District. The City of Hopkins is paying design and construction costs. The first part of that makeover began this past spring when workers demolished buildings on the watershed district property.



Cottageville Park community garden in Hopkins

The garden is a 40-foot-by-40-foot space in the southwest corner of the park. This is a pilot project for one year to see if the garden should become a permanent part of the park. Interested residents and local youth manage the garden, with oversight from the BRCC. This garden is communal, not divided into separate plots like many other community gardens and has demonstrated great success throughout this growing season.

The Blake Road Corridor is very diverse, and Ann Beuch, a TC LISC AmeriCorps member and organizer with the BRCC, is impressed with all the

interest in the garden from neighbors. “I’ve enjoyed watching youth become involved in the project,” she says. “That’s one benefit of the garden. A number of young people from the neighborhood have been eager to help plant, weed, and harvest, and often listen intently as our local gardening expert provides instructions. We had a small picnic with the first of our garden produce—making salads and grilling squash. Afterward, one youth told an adult that it was the best BBQ he’s ever had.”

Twin Cities LISC total neighborhood investments:

East Side, St. Paul--\$28 million invested, \$77.1 million leveraged

Central Corridor, St. Paul--\$38.1 million invested, \$125 million leveraged

Hopkins--\$234,250 invested, including a recent national award from the MetLife Foundation’s Community-Police Partnership program.