



Mount Hope Community Garden

Environmental Justice Case Study

Summary

The Mount Hope Community Garden is more than just a garden, it is a gathering space where residents connect with one another, share recipes and cultural practices, as well as find economic opportunity. Project New Village, a non-profit organization based in Southeastern San Diego, originally leased the empty lot from the City of San Diego before purchasing the property and making it permanent in 2011. Located in an area that has historically experienced food insecurity and has limited places to purchase healthy food options, the garden has served as a tool to address these challenges by improving access to healthy food. The space has become a hub for urban agriculture and is activated by community members growing their own food – contributing to positive mental health and nutritious fruit and vegetable options at home.

The Mount Hope Community Garden represents Project New Village's goals of increasing community ownership and independence in food production and improving the physical, mental, and economic well-being of the Mount Hope Community. To facilitate these efforts, the garden offers shared plots for members to grow food and herbs together. In addition to offering healthy food at affordable prices, the garden has expanded programming to operate a Mobile Farmer's Market at various locations throughout the community to bring healthy

food options to more people. As a whole, Mount Hope Community garden represents the determination of Mount Hope community members to nurture and improve their community.

Drivers and Funding

The idea for the Mount Hope Community Garden was born as a way to offer people more healthy food options and economic opportunities while encouraging fewer trips to fast food eateries or convenience stores. Since its conception, the garden has been supported by various funding sources, including Planned Parenthood, Verizon individual donors, and the Farmer's Market Promotion Project grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This funding, combined with work from community volunteers and AmeriCorps fellows, has made this work possible. With the funding available, organizers have been able to expand programming, purchase a truck to operate a mobile farmer's market, and fund vouchers for qualifying individuals. In addition, the garden serves as a gathering space for people in the neighborhood, offering tables and chairs, Wi-Fi, yoga, education on health and wellness, and numerous community events—turning the garden into a hub for resources that support community well being.

Health and Environmental/Climate Concerns

The Mount Hope Community Garden impacts health by providing a place for residents to buy fresh, nutritious food. When fast-food restaurants and convenience stores outnumber community gardens, farmer's markets, and grocery stores, people struggle to buy healthy food. Negative health outcomes such as diabetes, high cholesterol, and obesity are prevalent in areas where the market is oversaturated by unhealthy food outlets and people have less access to healthy choices. The Garden addresses this problem by increasing access to fresh produce and giving people more freedom to choose healthy options. Project New Village shares these techniques with community members, who can replicate them at home and at Mount Hope Community Garden.



Stakeholders and Engagement Methods

Project New Village partnered with local colleges to develop and implement surveys, such as the Geography Department at San Diego State University. The purpose was to engage Mount Hope residents and stakeholders to inform community needs. Results showed support for a community garden as a way of making more healthy and fresh food available in the area. Surveys results showed that people cared deeply about the health and security of their community and saw the ability to grow and sell their own food as an opportunity to foster these values in their own community.

To make this project possible, community members and stakeholders joined Project New Village to advocate for policies that would facilitate establishing a garden. Together, they were successful in adding policies to the City of San Diego's General Plan to encourage the use of vacant land and underused lots for community gardens. This framework has made it possible for the Mount Hope Community Garden and other urban agriculture projects to exist.



Challenges and Lessons Learned

While working to establish the Garden, organizers saw opportunities to streamline the permitting process for urban agriculture. A significant challenge encountered by Project New Village was the need to coordinate with several agencies to fulfill different requirements, which extended the time it took to implement the project. This included permitting the existing garden, addressing fee payments, and obtaining fee waivers where appropriate. Project Organizers highlight these challenges as potential areas where policy and regulatory changes can streamline processes for establishing community gardens throughout the city. By being persistent and continuing to call attention to problems, Project New Village and fellow advocates were able to address barriers.

Outcomes

The Mount Hope Community Garden enhances the health and well-being of community members in numerous ways:

- It supports the physical health of the community by providing a stable and accessible source of healthy food, decreasing residents’ need to rely on unhealthy options or chain stores that may come and go.
- It provides community members with a place to enjoy time in nature, whether they are attending a yoga session, tending to their crops, or sharing cultural recipes with other members of the community.
- It brings the People’s Produce Mobile Farmer’s Market truck to accessible locations in various neighborhoods throughout Southeastern San Diego, allowing people across the area to visit while running errands or going about their day-to-day activities.
- The project provides economic benefits by offering opportunities to grow food for supplemental income or saving on groceries.
- Produces an average of 500lbs. of compost per month to provide nutritious and chemical-free material to enrich the garden’s soil.

Together, these efforts are bringing healthy food options, increasing availability, and advancing environmental justice.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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