Eleanor Graham Community Garden and Ashland Park Design Project

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Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization Project

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Project Goals and Objectives

The District 13 Gardens Committee, a subcommittee of the District 13 council, sought a Conceptual Master Plan for the Eleanor Graham Community Garden and the surrounding green space. The goals for this project, as stated in the Eleanor Graham Community Garden Conceptual Redesign Proposal, included:

1. *To create a long-term conceptual master plan for the garden, as well as the Public Works and Parks land adjacent to it, uniting all the parcels in a single theme*
2. *To proactively plan these spaces anticipating the vacation of the Ashland Avenue access road, the reconstruction of Ayd Mill Road, and the rebuilding of the Hamline Avenue bridge*
3. *To make the space more aesthetically pleasing and historically interesting, both as a garden and as a destination for walks, picnics, and community gatherings*
4. *To make the space more useful to a growing number of gardeners and non-gardeners*
5. *To develop focal points along Hamline Avenue to calm passing vehicle traffic*
6. *To engage community residents and gardeners as stakeholders in the redesign process*

Tasks and Tools Utilized

Community involvement and meetings were essential to completing this design process. A total of six community meetings were held in the duration of this project. Several smaller meetings took place with the District 13 Gardens Committee and with the project supervisor. A variety of tools were used to facilitate community meetings. The design process, including the types of meetings and the tools used during the process, are described below.

Meeting with gardeners: The first community meeting for the project took place in September at the Eleanor Graham Community Garden with the community gardeners. General questions were asked about gardeners' needs and visions for the community garden and adjacent green space.

Site Analysis: Research on current site conditions, political context, and area demographics aided the approach to this design. The analysis of site conditions included a vegetation survey, five soil tests submitted to the University of Minnesota Extension Service, soil profile analysis, and basic mapping of general site characteristics. Reading was done on the controversial topic of the construction of Ayd Mill Road and community responses to the proposal. Finally, general information on site demographics was gathered. Most of this information is included in the project folder submitted with the final report to

District 13 Community Council and Gardens Committee. Digital files are included on the disc submitted with the final project summary.

Block group meetings: Three block group meetings included the participation of both neighbors and gardeners. Each meeting was held in the home of a different community member, targeting the participation of different block groups. For these meetings, several tools were used to help facilitate discussion and feedback from participants:

1. Context map locating Eleanor Graham Community Garden and Ashland Park within surrounding greenspace. This map demonstrated the lack of park and garden space for this area.
2. Map of current conditions for community garden and Ashland Park.
3. Maps showing three different potential site scales: one with Ashland Street intact and the community garden remaining a separate entity from park space; another showing the vacation of Ashland Avenue and the community garden and park as a combined area; and finally, a map of the community garden, Ashland Park, and the green space southeast of the site (bordering Summit Avenue) as a unified site.
4. Photographs of a variety of potential park and garden elements were used to aid in the clarification of brainstorming lists and to provide various examples of different aesthetic possibilities.
5. Captioned photographs of current site conditions for both Eleanor Graham Community Garden and Ashland Park were provided.
6. Large maps of the community garden and park space at both scales were used with trace paper overlays to hold pseudo-charettes. Color markers were used to sketch out ideas for garden and park elements and their locations.
7. Surveys were given to illicit feedback from meeting participants. People were asked to rank their top three choices for park programming, comment on their ranking for programming, check off park and garden elements they would and would *not* like to see in the project, and finally, comment on the choices they made. Note: The survey was refined after the first meeting.

Survey Analysis and Initial Site Designs: Survey results were tallied and comments were entered into a word document for analysis. Charts and graphs were created to illustrate the priorities of people who filled out the surveys. Using the top choices for site elements and programming, two initial designs were drawn.

Community Feedback Session: All community members were invited to look at the initial design drafts and provide feedback for the final design. Feedback came in the forms of dialogue and a written survey. Tools for this meeting included:

1. PowerPoint presentation of design process thus far and survey results from block group meeting. This presentation was meant to inform participants who were present but unable to attend earlier input sessions and to present survey results.

2. Current site conditions poster with a hand-rendered map of the site and numbered photographs that related to map locations. This was an additional resource meant for those who had missed previous meetings and a reference when viewing the two designs.
3. Hard copy documents of survey results for those who preferred to view things on paper and to take home.
4. Two posters of site designs, titled Design A and Design B.
5. A survey that asked participants "what works" and "what does *not* work" in each design.

Second Survey Analysis and Final Site Design: Surveys and comments were compiled in a word document and reviewed. A list was made of all park and garden elements that were generally agreed upon and needed to be included within the design. The final design was constructed using this list along with input from previous meetings and input sessions. A detailed conceptual design was done for the Eleanor Graham Community Garden and Ashland Park area and a broader conceptual design was completed for an area which included the southeastern greenspace.

Community Presentation of Design: Community and general public invited to view the Conceptual Master Plan for the project. All previous maps were posted and the final poster presentation given. Printouts of the previous survey comments were given for reference and justification for design decisions. Project summary and files were given to District 13 Community Council.

Research Findings

The Eleanor Graham Community Garden and adjacent green spaces are the only nearby open spaces for Snelling/Hamline residents. Therefore, the preservation and development of these areas is of great importance to the community. There is an active, dedicated group of community gardeners working diligently to improve and further develop the garden space. However, the entire Snelling/Hamline (now District 13) neighborhood realizes that there is a lack of park programming, particularly active space for youth. Many young families with children have moved into the neighborhood. Currently, there are no playgrounds within walking distance for these families. The number one priority for the majority of those who participated in block group meetings was areas for family gathering and recreation, playgrounds for children, and open field space for active recreation.

In addition to active space for children, many community members wanted paths that would encourage neighborhood residents to walk through the area. Interesting plantings and a variety of gathering spaces needed to be created. Protecting the large bur oak trees on site was important. Planting barriers to block road noise and pollution were also a priority. Many community members were interested in planting areas with edible species and gardens that would attract birds, butterflies, and pollinators.

The most disagreement occurred over whether or not a parking lot should be included in the design for the site. Many people were opposed to a parking lot, concerned that it was antithetical to the idea of a neighborhood park and that people would be encouraged to drive rather than walk to the area. Most people agreed that some sort of drop off or temporary parking had to be included in order for the gardeners to deliver tools, soil, compost, and other materials to the gardens.

Seating, picnic tables, and other gathering areas were needed throughout the area. The design needed to incorporate quiet, restful areas in addition to active spaces. The southeastern greenspace is intended to be a more peaceful area with formal plantings. The gazebo in this area was requested to provide shelter from the weather and serve as a possible location for weddings, concerts, and other community activities. This area will need to be further designed in the near future.

Final Outcome

District 13 currently has a conceptual master plan for the Eleanor Graham Community Garden and the nearby park space informed by community input and processes.

Next Steps

The District 13 Community Council, Garden's Committee, and community members are ready to take the design to the next step. There are a few options District 13 may want to consider in order to take this project further:

- Further developing designs, creating planting plans and site construction documents.
- Acquiring the leases for the adjacent green spaces and constructing a political plan of action for the park project.
- Applying for additional grants to implement aspects of the design plans that can be installed immediately.

Eleanor Graham Community Garden and Ashland Park Conceptual Design

Design Intent

The intention of this design is to provide multiple types of spaces that a diversity of neighbors will use and enjoy. This design divides the area into two types of spaces: active and passive. The northern area of this site is defined by quiet gathering spaces, a large bur oak, prairie planting, and a boundary created by berry bushes. The hill will provide a serene location to look over the activities taking place throughout the area. There is a mowed picnic area under the northern bur oak. The original footpath is retained for neighborhood access. Additional plots have been added, some with the intention of becoming group plots (plots where multiple people sign a contract to garden together and agree what to grow). An edible berry patch is placed between the orchard and the garden plots, providing a space for gardeners to gather fruit that has not been grown close to the busy roads. The orchard contains a picnic area within it, providing a semi-private area to gather in the middle of the site. The stone council ring has a fire pit and is a place where gardeners can hold meetings, rest, and share their harvest.

A winding path separates the community garden from the active family space. Pedestrians can enjoy the meandering experience of the path and bicyclists will be encouraged to slow their speed. The large open field is the center of the active space. It provides enough room for a variety of athletic activities or family events. The playground to the southwest corner of the site is surrounded by larger trees that will provide shade in the summer months. The trees provide a sense of security for the playground while simultaneously allowing neighbors to keep on eye on children at play. At the southeastern corner of the site, a woodland planting surrounds the path as it leads to the Summit Avenue park. The woodland will frame the path, creating both a buffer between pedestrians and the street and nearby homes and pedestrians. For safety, light posts have been placed throughout the area.

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