

SSPP Garden Project Initiation Plan

February 2012

~~ Mission Statement ~~

To offer the children at SS Peter and Paul school in Williamsville the opportunity to learn about growing and preparing real food in order to enhance their awareness of healthy nutritious eating habits, through a hands-on, educational experience in the natural environment."

Summary

This proposal outlines our plans to initiate a vegetable garden at Ss Peter and Paul School in Williamsville. The mission of this project, outlined above, will take shape by integrating classroom education for all children at the school into the activities necessary to plant, maintain and harvest a raised-bed garden plot as well as a rooftop garden on the school's premises. The children will take part in planting seeds, planting seedlings, observing and maintaining the growing plants, and harvesting the vegetables and fruits. In addition, the harvested goods will be prepared and cooked during classroom sessions, to give every child the opportunity to sample the fruits of their labor.

To this effect, we propose to have 6 raised garden beds, each 32 sq ft, on the grounds in front of the church at the corner of Main and Grove streets. In addition, the rooftop above the garage will provide space for vegetables and herbs that grow well in pots. The beds will be filled thematically, so that they can be assigned to specific classrooms, and so that there is clarity on the meal choices that they will yield. It is expected that all children K - 7th grade participate in the Spring planting season, and 1st - 8th grade participate in Fall harvesting.

In order to build the garden, we budget \$2000 in costs for the initiation and first year operation. Most of this cost is for wood required to build the raised-bed structures. Additional costs are for pots for the rooftop garden, for compost, and for seeds. We propose to finance these costs in three different ways. First, we will be recruiting in-kind donations of any of the required supplies. Second, we plan to recruit sponsors for any of the individual raised beds, with small tasteful acknowledgements of the sponsors visible from Main Street. Last, we propose a Craft Beer & BBQ fundraiser at a suitable date (spring or summer), to give everyone affiliated with the school and church an opportunity to contribute on a small scale.

To assure that planting can be started this spring, we propose the following time line. In February, the Planning Team will make efforts to do all fundraising and recruitment of help. In addition, the team will meet with the teachers to discuss the specific plans for each class, as well as outline the expectations. In March, the team - with the help of the school community - will start constructing the garden beds and secure all other hardware. To allow for a break around Easter, the beds will be finalized in mid-April. Outdoor planting is expected to happen at the end of April or into May, depend on the weather conditions by then. During summer hiatus, the team will retain responsibility for the garden plot, but will recruit further help. Our harvest and food preparation plans will be further designed during the spring and summer months.

We hope that the garden will become a main stay at SS Peter and Paul. In the future but within our reach, we envision expansion with a greenhouse addition to the rooftop, and a larger plot of land, possibly at the location across from Grove street.

Acknowledgement

The detailed plans are a summary of the efforts of our dedicated team of volunteers, who have each contributed their time, knowledge and skills to reach this point.

Garden Project Planning team: Willard Brooks, Kitty Brooks, David Hioki, Jennifer Powell, Robin Thuman, and John Vilaro.

Background

All around the USA schools are starting vegetable gardens. There has been a realization that children nowadays are mostly raised disconnected from the natural environment, which has direct consequences for their understanding of where food comes from, and thus for what they choose to eat. Fast food abounds, families eat on the run rather than savoring food together around the dining table, and our culture of cooking and togetherness is getting lost. A generation of people has graduated college not knowing how to cook themselves, and not able to pass on this knowledge to their children now that they are starting families of their own. Hence, there is a renewed call for schools to participate in the kind of education that teaches children what “real food” is, what grows versus what is prepared with artificial fillers, what is healthy or not, and some plain old “home economics”.

A school vegetable garden, fully integrated in the schools curriculum, contributes to this teaching in a fun and hands-on way. From vast experience (for instance Alice Waters's Edible Schoolyard project in Berkeley CA), it has been shown that children who grow food themselves are more eager to try to eat veggies, and are more likely to actually like them. In addition to giving them the skills to make good choices for their own nutrition, children participating in raising gardens will learn about the biology of plants and the environment that plants need to grow, and develop appreciation for the work and skill that is necessary to make this happen.

We hope that by participating in our school garden, our children will bring home a better understanding and appreciation of the natural world, and will be able to make better choices for their own nutrition and that of their families for the rest of their lives. Beyond the obvious farming skills (planting, weeding, harvesting), the project will allow the teachers to include aspects of biology, environmental science, health science, and cooking skills.

Sources:

- Alice Waters --> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTadAxKxq3M&feature=related>
- Berkeley Study --> <http://www.theatlantic.com/life/archive/2010/09/berkeley-s-new-school-food-study-a-victory-for-alice-waters/63465/>
- Time to Revive Home Economics --> <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/06/opinion/revive-home-economics-classes-to-fight-obesity.html>
- No Lunch Left Behind --> <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/20/opinion/20waters.html>

Location specifics

Father Jerome Kopec has graciously offered space on the front lawn of the church. The area that we plan to use for raised beds is on the far left corner when facing the church, along Grove street starting from the intersection with Main street, up to where the grass ends (see figures 1 and 2). The area available for planting is about 12 ft wide and 45 ft long (540 sq ft). We plan to fill this site with 6 beds, each 32 sq ft, 8 ft long and 4 ft wide. Each bed will be 1 or 2 ft high – dependent on the cost of the wood that we will be able to procure. While higher beds are better because of deeper soil conditions, this may not be financially feasible. A decision on this will be made by early March.

In between the beds we will use mulch or some other type of inexpensive filler material, so that there will be no need for a lawnmower to access the space in between the beds. There will be attention to the appearance of the beds, given that they are in a very visible location on the church front lawn.



Figure 1: Abby on the front lawn location.

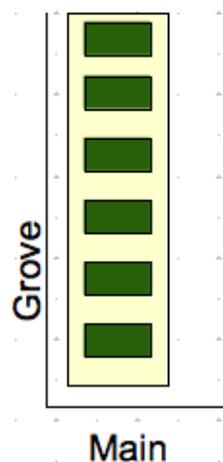


Figure 2: Outline of 6 beds

The rooftop above the school garage (~300 sq ft) will be used as additional space for plants that grow well in pots (see figure 3). At this point, we plan to have primarily tomatoes and herbs there. The rooftop was inspected by a qualified consultant who donated his time (off the company's records), and has been deemed structurally safe to bear the extra weight of pots with soil as well as a number of people. The rooftop is surrounded by a wall approximately 4 ft high, so there is no danger for young children to fall off, and they should be safe on this deck.

The rooftop also harbors an old metal structure that was previously the scaffolding of an awning (the deck was used for outdoor recreation for a former priest and later for teachers). Our idea is that this structure should be converted into a greenhouse, by covering it with sturdy plastic or some other material. For this initial year of planting, we are not pursuing this, but it could give the seedlings an early start next year (season 2012-2013).

Both of the locations still need some attention to water access. We will look into this as the sites are being constructed, with the help of school and church personnel.

For future expansion, we have approached the International Chimney company that owns a small plot of grassland across Grove street (behind the school parking lot, see figure 3). For the 2012 planting season, we are not projecting to use this land yet.

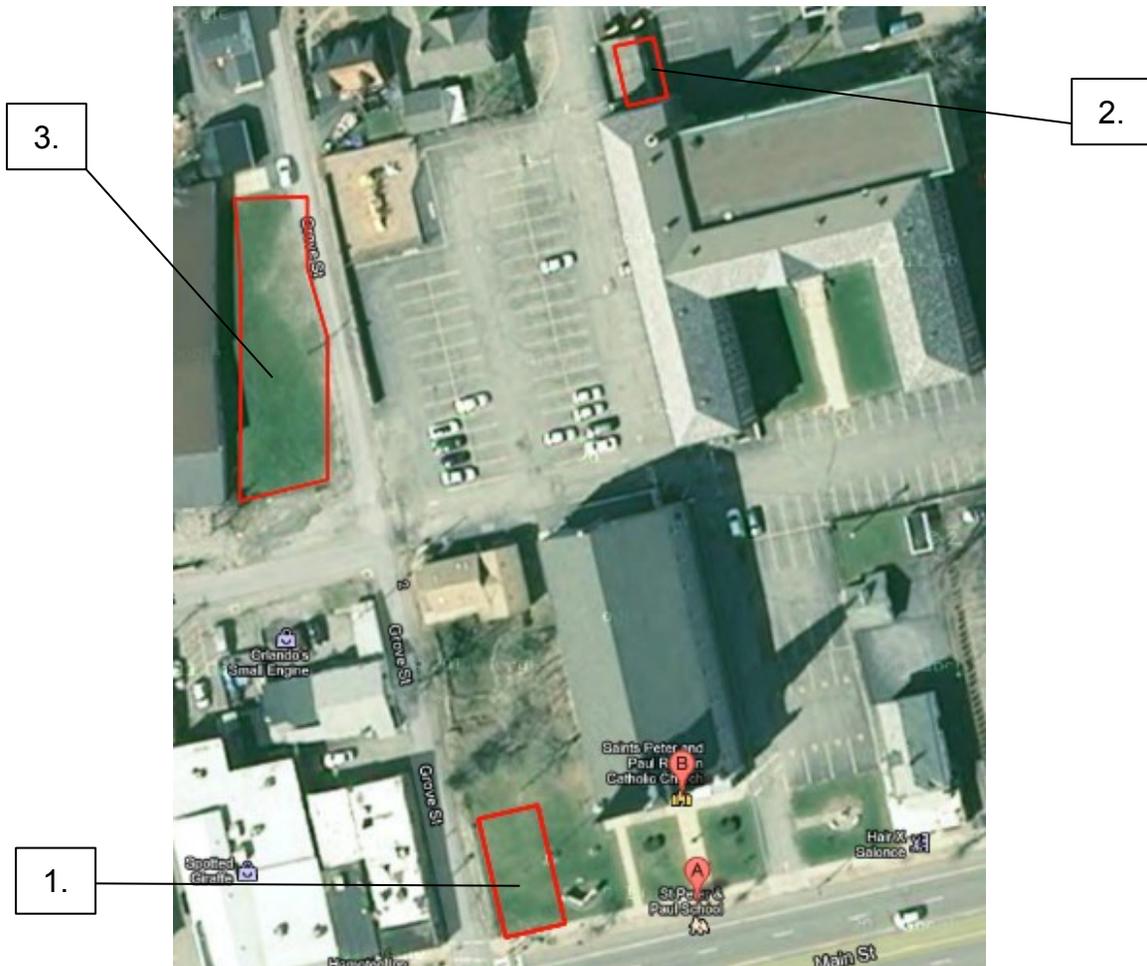


Figure 3. Outlined areas for gardening: 1. Front lawn; 2. Rooftop above garage; 3. Potential expansion site at International Chimney Co.

Construction specifics

The first step is to prepare the grounds for planting. We will rototill the area that we plan to use and also perform a soil test to understand what fertilizing modifications we may need.

To construct the beds we plan to purchase boards measuring 12ft long x 1ft wide x 2 inches thick. These will be cut in 4 ft and 8 ft long parts, and secured against 4x4 posts that form the borders. Each board is estimated to cost \$30-40/board. We are looking into cheaper options. The wood is ideally untreated so that no chemicals will leach into the vegetables. For construction, several of the team members are available with skill and equipment, but we will seek additional help from the community.

The beds will be filled with compost that we will obtain from the Town of Amherst for \$20/cu yd. We anticipate needing 2-3 cu yd per bed for a total of 18 - 20 cu yd (including soil needed for pots). We are fortunate to have several people on the team with trucks that hold this load, but will recruit more help with this too.

Budget

Cost breakdown:

Boards: 24 12x1 boards @ \$40 /pc	~\$1000
Posts: 24 corners, 4x4 boards (8?)	~\$100
Compost: 20 cu yd @ \$20	~\$400
Seeds, source material, cooking supplies etc.:	~\$500
Total:	\$2000

At this time there is no definite source of income to finance the costs. We will pursue fundraising (see next chapter) and anticipate that some of the donations will come in time for the purchases. The team is willing to advance the cost.

Fundraising

I. In kind donations

The team will be asking the community for connections to local businesses (nurseries and hardware suppliers) that may be able to provide us with some of our supplies at reduced or no cost.

II. Sponsorship

We propose to give local business owners the opportunity to sponsor one of each of our garden beds. The proposed fee for this is \$300-400 / bed. The sponsors will need to be acknowledged in all of our communications pertaining to this project, and will get a small, tasteful but notable sign on the sponsored bed acknowledging their contribution. If we sell all 6 beds, we will have financed all of our operations this year.

III. Grants

There are grants available for the operation of school yards. Most of these target underserved communities or have special requirements (such as to plant “the most creative veggies”) that we can't meet this year. We are keeping an eye on these opportunities.

IV. Fundraiser

We want to have a fundraising event that brings the entire community together and creates awareness for our efforts. The event allows everyone to pitch in a bit of money towards the goal of the garden project, and will hopefully also aid in recruiting the help that the team will need throughout the summer and for the years to come. At this time, we envision a Craft Beer & BBQ annual event that will showcase local brews and focus on local farmers for our food sources. Within the team there are connections to beer suppliers as well as to organizations that have this focus (Slow Food Buffalo, Field & Fork network) that should make this a viable event. The event should be held at a time when the weather is warm enough to be outdoors. We will be in communication with the school administration about the best timing for this. Details will be further worked out in the upcoming months.

Timeline

February 8: board meeting – proposal approval

February 13: planning committee meeting to schedule fundraising efforts

February: fundraising

End February/early March: plan layout to and discussions with teaching staff

March 3-4: groundbreaking – possibly with a special blessing ceremony!

March 10-11: rototilling and placing of postholes

March 17-18: building of raised beds

March 24-25: extra construction weekend in case of weather delays

April 14-15: fill beds with compost, place pots

April 21-22: overflow weekend

March – April: students start to work on sprouting seeds indoors ahead of planting outside.

End April – May: planting time.

June – July – August: team will take over maintenance (with help to be recruited).

August – October: harvesting

September – October: food preparation sessions

The garden team has been asked to reserve all construction weekends as much as possible. Starting with the family folder of February 9th, we will start approaching the school parent community with request for help. We will be asking for strong bodies to help with the construction phase, and for people with daytime availability to help out the teachers during the planting season.

During the remainder of the school year, the planning team will continue to work on ongoing issues. We will recruit help for the summer months, particularly for August when there may be some early harvest prior to the start of the school year. We will also work on our proposed fundraiser and any other funding issues that are still pending. Furthermore, we will start planning more in-depth for the food preparation sessions, and recruit volunteers for these from our community.

Bed planting design

We have made a detailed plan that outlines the number of plants of specific kinds that we can fit in the allotted space. Our design has focussed on grouping the vegetables thematically, such that each class (group of classes) can prepare a specific dish or dish combination from the harvested vegetables.

The proposed themes are:

- Mexican salsa
- Garden salad
- Italian (tomato sauce and greens)
- Ratatouille
- Stir fry
- Three Sisters (corn, beans & squash native american tradition)

The vegetables that are included in the 2012 planting selection are: onions, peppers, corn, beans, squash, eggplant, tomatoes, broccoli, rappini (broccoli rabe), scallions, carrots, snow peas, daikon radish, red radish, spinach, lettuce, cucumbers, and potatoes. We will also plant herbs: rosemary, thyme, oregano, parsley, chives, cilantro, and basil.

Most of the vegetables and some herbs will be grown in the raised beds. Tomato plants will be placed primarily in pots on the rooftop (few exceptions).

We will strive to make our garden as organic as possible. Although we will not necessarily be using certified organic material for compost and seeds (for costsaving reasons primarily), we will definitely not use pesticides. Instead, the garden will be enriched with flowers and herbs (marigolds, lemonbalm) that will serve as pest deterrants. In addition, we will have lots of little hands to help with weed control.

Our suggestion is to bring these themes to the teachers as a guideline, but to let them decide together with their students what to actually name the assigned beds to create ownership by the students. At other school gardens we have noted some fun creativity with this – and we encourage expansion of ideas that come from this interaction.

A detailed planting time line and bed design is available as an appendix to this proposal.

Curriculum integration

We have started this garden initiative with the concept in mind that the structural components and logistics – including maintenance during summer hiatus - will be provided by the planning team. However, we are hoping that the teaching staff will take initiative to incorporate the gardening in their lesson plans as appropriate. They will also be expected to guide their students during the planting and harvesting time, making time out of their day for this, and understanding what their classes part of the project is. We anticipate that there will be volunteer help for the gardening sessions, and will be recruiting this actively in concurrence with the teachers. During our interactions in February, we will outline some sources where teachers can get information specific to gardening lesson plans.

We propose that all children K - 7th grade participate in the Spring planting season, and 1st – 8th grade participate in Fall harvesting. Since we will have only 6 beds and some rooftop space for the current year, we are going to need to combine classes and grades in each assigned space. Each garden bed will need to be shared, and the task load per child will be very minimal. Some indication as to how much work each bed is going to bring (how many plants total) is available in the appendix that outlines the planting timeline.

To facilitate the bed-sharing, we think it will be best to do vertical integration among the grades, combining older and younger grades as the teachers best see fit. The school has experience with this (for instance last year's "fun day" before Christmas break as well as the ongoing "buddy" system). This will be particularly helpful when it comes to food preparation time, as we imagine that the younger children will need help with basic cooking skills such as cutting and heating. The details of this configuration will be worked out during February and March in discussions with the teachers.

In addition to the logistics of planting and harvesting, there are some other needs that the garden may present. We have discussed having a rainwater collection barrel (or more than one) and also a composting bin. These could become classroom projects for the older grades. We will be asking teachers for their interest in participating in such projects. Finally, there will be a need for some basic gardening supplies, such as shovels. Currently, there is no money in the budget for this, but should our fundraising work well, these are things that will get consideration. For now, we will need to ask children to bring these from home ("to borrow"). We ask the teachers to communicate their needs to us, so that we can put our efforts towards them.