A SUSTAINABLE PERSPECTIVE INTO THE VALUATION OF COMMUNITY GARDENS:
The Benefits of Ecosystem Services on Community Development

Community Gardens = Critical Environmental Areas = The Eco-Democratizing of the Greening of Land Use Valuation

Valuation of private Real Estate Land Grab: Justified by NYC, municipal de-valuation of Boardwalk Community Garden, Brooklyn, NY

Community gardens in New York City can be considered as quaint landscaping amenities, spatially distributed on public land parcels throughout the city. They are that but much more. The vast majority of community gardens can be found—spatially clustered—wherever unemployment and poverty are disproportionately concentrated within historically segregated communities of color. As such, community gardens also represent how these historically under-resourced communities have peacefully and collectively cultivated their cultural resistance to being defined by such marginalization. To be sure, this community-based civic resistance to inequality and marginalization has given rise to political-economic tension with municipal land use policy makers. The presence of community gardens intervening into the conventional assumptions and practices for the built urban fabric is quite often regarded by such policy makers as disruptive. This Taconic Project, has, as its primary objective, the engagement of local community stakeholders in advocating for public policy change in relation to Eco-Democratizing the Greening of Public Land Use Valuation and Disposition. The project:

1. utilizes the quantification, and commensurate monetization, of Ecosystems Services—coming from community gardens—as a means for introducing a more comprehensively informed basis, via cost-benefit analyses, by which to begin to address and, hopefully, to offer a means by which to begin to resolve the aforementioned top-to-bottom, municipal-to-community dichotomy of resistance and perceived disruption; in so doing, it

2. addresses the historically entrenched dual assumption of a) disparate valuations of public land resources based on "competing" interests and b) the propriety of who ultimately decides the disposition of public land resources—especially if such disposition results in socially disparate and deleterious impacts. To date, municipal land use policy has been largely determined by public land use policy makers' deference to real estate valuation considerations and development priorities. In practice, this type of valuation methodology - notwithstanding its "rational basis" - has served to justify default municipal land use decision-making patterns of de facto Socio-Ecological Triage. This practice continues to this day to reinforce the "Triple Bottom Line" marginalization of communities of color and the concomitant destruction of community gardens. The loss community gardens and their complement of ecosystem services is not only detrimental to the sustainability and resilience of local communities but to the city as a whole. Such outcomes and contingencies should be particularly concerning to all stakeholders—given New York City's built environmental vulnerabilities as a coastal city to the increasingly climate change-induced extreme weather events; finally, this project

3. is inspired by the seminal municipal valuation research project, "The Effect of Community Gardens on Neighboring Property Values"—conducted by Vicki Been (2008), of the NYU Furman Center and former Commissioner of the NYC HPD. That project concluded that in NYC, over the course of a twenty-year span (which is the time needed for gardens to mature, i.e. from 1983 to 2003), community gardens were responsible for contributing net tax revenues of (depending on the varying cost calculations) anywhere from $325 million to $500 million to the city. Furthermore, the most robust Returns-to-Scale occurred out of those community gardens located in the most economically marginalized sections of the city. With this type of Return-to-Scale, Been reasoned that NYC could consider the use of a bond instrument, known as Tax Increment Finance, coupled with Impact Funding. Similarly, this project seeks to document ecosystem services Returns-to-Scale—though not necessarily from a municipal tax revenue perspective per se.

How Developed Community Gardens & Ecosystem Services Provide Economic Benefits

WATER
- ➡ Improves Water Quality
- ➡ Increases Water Supply
- ➡ Reduces Flooding
- ✓ Reduces City Water Treatment Costs
- ✓ Reduces Need for More Grey Infrastructure

ENERGY
- ➡ Reduces Urban Heat Island
- ➡ Regulates Ground & Building Temperatures
- ✓ Increases City Energy Efficiency
- ✓ Reduces Infrastructure Upkeep Costs
- ✓ Reduces Need for More Grey Infrastructure

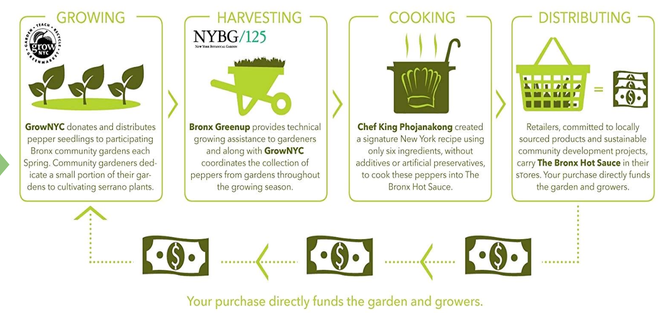
HEALTH & LIVABILITY
- ➡ Reduces Atmospheric CO_2
- ➡ Reduces Noise Pollution
- ➡ Provides Food Growing
- ➡ Creates Wildlife Habitat
- ✓ Increases Local Community Resiliency
- ✓ Reduces Need More Treatment Facilities
- ✓ Creates Food Availability & Businesses

COMMUNITY CULTURE PRESERVATION & DEV.
- ➡ Facilitates Community Organizing
- ➡ Promotes Healthy Neurological Dev.
- ➡ Nurtures Cooperative Culture Ethos
- ✓ Increases Employability for Green Jobs
- ✓ Reduces Stress & Crime Rates
- ✓ Promotes Organic Resource Recycling

Community Gardens Threatened by Real Estate Development Interests:
Quantifying & Monetizing Community Garden Ecosystem Services

Greening Land Use Valuation ⟷ **Regenerative Economy** ⟷ Eco-Democratizing Policy-making

Public Policy Transformation:
Community Gardens Preservation via Abolition of de facto Social-Ecological Triage



Samuel S. T. Pressman - M.S. Sustainable Environmental Systems Student
Raymond Figueroa Jr. - Visiting Faculty, GCPE (SES)