



MEMORANDUM

August 31, 2009

To: Richard Conlin, Council President,
Chair of the Environment, Emergency Management, and Utilities Committee
Richard McIver, Vice Chair
Tim Burgess, Member
Sally Clark, Alternate

From Stella Chao, Director

Re: P-Patch Program Evaluation

Attachments: Evaluation Executive Summary, Recommendations Summary

The Department of Neighborhoods has completed a program evaluation for the P-Patch Community Garden program for the City of Seattle.

The Evaluation consisted of qualitative information collected through community focus groups as well as quantitative program data collected over several years. Both sets of data were analyzed and integrated to provide the most accurate possible view of the program scope, strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.

A detailed set of recommendations emerged from these analyses, which outlines short term and long term actions to improve the program and expand opportunities for community members. Some of these recommendations can be implemented through program priorities and process improvements. Other recommendations require additional resources which will be difficult to allocate during our current fiscal crisis and will be postponed until better economic circumstances.

The Executive Summary and the Summary Table of Recommendations are attached as part of this briefing document.





CITY OF SEATTLE
DEPARTMENT OF



**A STROLL IN THE GARDEN:
An Evaluation of the P-Patch Program
August 2009**

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For more information on the P-Patch program or questions regarding this report,
please call City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods at 206-684-0464
or write us at P.O. Box 94649, Seattle, WA 98124-4649
www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ppatch/

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Seattle's P-Patch program is one of the oldest and most successful community gardening programs in the nation. The **purpose** of the program is to support and promote community based organic urban agriculture and other greening opportunities that are culturally and neighborhood appropriate. The **goal** of the P-Patch Program is to build communities through gardening and to incorporate community gardens into the fabric of neighborhoods by breaking down urban isolation, providing restorative places and maximizing participation from all residents regardless of age, income, ability, gender or ethnicity. P-Patch gardens integrate communities with the open spaces that surround them, at times transforming unused open space while revitalizing a neighborhood's spirit. Population growth in urban centers, a recent increase in environmental stewardship, and the current economic downturn have raised interest in P-Patch for its multiple community benefits.

This evaluation has been conducted to provide us with information, analyses and recommendations to incorporate P-Patches into the City's on-going planning and community building efforts. Those efforts maintain and increase the livability of Seattle neighborhoods, and strategically address community needs around access to affordable, healthy foods. Community feedback and program data were analyzed and resulted in a list of 38 recommendations for the program addressing strategic planning and performance measures, demand management, resource allocation, communications and administration.

Overview of Findings and Recommendations

Since the last strategic plan for 2001-2005, many changes have occurred in Seattle and over the nation. Though the mission and values of the program continue to be strong and help guide the program, new goals and strategies should be developed that take advantage of current public and political interests and maximize leveraging of resources.

- The P-Patch program should undergo a strategic planning process that will integrate current opportunities and demands to maximize success. The strategic plan should address issues around capital investment planning, an analysis of staff workloads and budget implications, guidelines for garden development according to population needs and community building measures.

Gardeners are overwhelmingly positive about the value of the program to the community and the individual gardener. Despite a lack of tracking guidelines and program benchmarks the P-Patch program has served the community well. However, this lack of program measures makes consistent and meaningful evaluation difficult. Program data is not organized to measure and evaluate performance or progress towards goals. It also limits the Department's ability to develop plans for improvements, adopt best practices, and increase performance.

- The program should develop consistent ways to measure the key benefits and monitor areas for program improvement that were identified by stakeholders: **Strengths:** Relationship Building, Supportive Staff, Mental Health and Spiritual Wellbeing, Source of Food and Economic Security, Sense of Personal Satisfaction, Skills Development, Progressive Leadership. **Weaknesses:** Need for improved coordination between City departments, Additional Capital Development Funds, Need for Increased Training for

Gardeners, Strategies to Address Theft and Vandalism, Need for Improved Communication and Support among Gardeners and with staff, More Strategies to Address Volunteer Fatigue.

The P-Patch Program has limited ways to identify demand which can limit the program's ability to develop more effective and equitable strategies for management. Demand for garden plots outpaces funding or other garden expansion opportunities. Addressing these key drivers of demand; waitlists, geographic areas of density, and disparate access, is complicated by cost and availability of land, political and societal interest, and staffing intensity.

- Additional drivers of demand and strategies to meet them should be identified and analyzed through a strategic planning process. The program should better address equity in geographic distribution of P-Patch gardens.
- The program should develop options to address the waitlist, identify City properties suitable for P-Patches, and develop alternative strategies such as increasing community partnerships.
- The program should identify new strategies to improve access to program services and resources for under-represented populations

P-Patch is poised to be a change agent in the growing awareness of environmental, economic, and social sustainability. Gardeners are able to find helpful information on the P-Patch website, and partnerships with non-profit groups provide opportunities for learning. However, outreach and education can be improved:

- Marketing and communications strategies should be updated to produce materials to better educate the public about community gardening, improve access for under-served communities, and engage people in P-Patch gardening to improve neighborhoods, address climate change, and build healthier communities.

Program administration barriers exist due to a limited technology infrastructure. Staff must travel to the downtown office location to access the program database in order to input, update, or collect information for projects. Addressing this inefficiency may free up staff time to provide more garden services.

- Invest in technological capacity to improve customer services through web-based application and payment processes, improved communications strategies and community organizing through social networking.

P-Patch is a strong asset for the City and its residents. Through improvements in management and strategic direction, the program can synergistically improve the City's ability to address a host of other community needs. This potential is anecdotally realized, but an investment in planning analysis and infrastructure improvements will create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

APPENDIX M: PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

Issue Area	Problem Description	Recommendations
<p>Strategic Planning and Performance Measurement</p>	<p>SP 1: Largely anecdotal information is available regarding public benefits of community gardens.</p>	<p>SP 1 Rec 1: Conduct a public benefit analysis based on the program's capacity to use gardens to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - meet health initiatives - maximize low cost use of unbuildable City-owned property - support environmental protection <p>SP 1 Rec 2: Develop cost-benefit criteria that informs program funding, land use policy, public access to resources, and staffing allocations.</p>
	<p>SP 2: Land values are high and available land in areas of density are limited</p>	<p>SP 2 Rec 1: Urban Planning policies should include options to address expansion of community garden space in developing areas.</p> <p>SP 2 Rec 2: Identify long term goals of the P-Patch program (example total acreage or plots per population) that link to comprehensive plan</p>
	<p>SP 3: Program operates in a reactive mode responding to emerging opportunities</p>	<p>SP 3 Rec 1: Program goals should be set that align with growth management goals and increasing population needs for community gardens</p> <p>SP 3 Rec 2: Identify additional drivers of demand for community gardens outside of wait list and population statistics</p>
	<p>SP 4: Workload ratios need to be updated</p>	<p>SP 4 Rec 1: More detailed analysis of garden service needs should be conducted to estimate workload ratios and provide better guidance of staffing needs. A staffing methodology should be defined.</p>
	<p>SP 5: The P-Patch program needs to establish overall and annual goals and targets for community garden needs.</p>	<p>SP 5 Rec 1: Establish clear policies on how many gardens are needed across the city, what the program's minimum service level goals are so that DON can compare performance each year. With the approval of the Parks Levy in 2008, which includes funding for P-Patches, this task will be critical to how funds are used.</p> <p>SP 5 Rec 2: Establish benchmarks and tracking systems for program management and on-going performance evaluation</p>

Issue Area	Problem Description	Recommendations
Demand Management	DM 1: The waitlist for garden plots is almost equal to the number of available plots in the program's inventory.	DM 1 Rec 1: Revise waitlist procedures, review program policies around plot allocation DM 1 Rec 2: Review development of term limits or public benefit requirements for gardeners related to plot allocation
	DM 2: P-Patch gardener demographics are not representative of the City's population and the neighborhood population.	DM 2 Rec 1: Conduct a GIS analysis to identify underserved areas of the city. DM 2 Rec 2: Conduct study to identify lack of interest or barriers to access for under-represented populations
	DM 3: The City has a finite number of properties suitable for P-Patches, and alternative strategies are needed to address the need for community gardens	DM 3 Rec 1: Inventory available public land, prioritize sites and evaluate development options. This analysis should take into account smaller parcels of land that might not accommodate a traditional P-Patch, and should include a gap analysis. DM 3 Rec 2: Expand partnership opportunities with more housing, faith-based, community development association, and non-profit landowners
Resource Allocation	RA 1: Improvements to Leveraging Resources	RA 1 Rec 1: Develop and formalize a Capital Investment Plan RA 1 Rec 2: Inventory of City properties and analysis of potential for community gardens RA 1 Rec 3: Develop stronger partnerships with other public and private landowners, such as low-income housing developments
	RA 2: Minimal training and technical support provided to community groups and individuals	RA 2 Rec 1: Create an outreach strategy for program to include increased field time RA 2 Rec 2: Formalize training strategy for staff to include facilitation and conflict resolution RA 2 Rec 3: Create training strategy for volunteers to include gardening skills
	RA 3: Community partners have limited capacity to increase their roles in partnership	RA 3 Rec 1: Build stronger and new Community Partnerships to support operations and maintenance of community gardens, and maximize their impact on food systems and food security. RA 3 Rec 2: Invest in building the capacity of the P-Patch Trust to support gardeners and gardens – steady stream of interns facilitated by the City, organizational development. RA 3 Rec 3: Invest in community organizing and community capacity building to reduce City operations and maintenance costs in the long run

Issue Area	Problem Description	Recommendations
Communications and Administration	CA 1: No benchmarking or program tracking to compare program to others	<p>CA 1 Rec 1: Development benchmarking standards and annual process. Revise data collection procedures to track relevant data. Should include analysis of staffing, volunteer participation, garden success.</p> <p>CA 1 Rec 2: Develop biannual training sessions on benchmarking for management and supervisory staff.</p> <p>CA 1 Rec 3: Complete a strategic planning process that incorporates benchmarking procedures for the program and update every five years</p>
	CA 2: No standard performance measures to enable routine and consistent review of program performance	<p>CA 2 Rec 1: Develop performance measures and revise data collection procedures to track relevant data</p> <p>CA 2 Rec 2: Develop biannual training sessions on PMs for management and supervisory staff</p> <p>CA 2 Rec 3: Complete a strategic planning process for the program that includes procedures for annual PM development and update every five years</p> <p>CA 2 Rec 4: Develop standard operating procedures for key staff functions and standard outreach strategies for each garden type.</p> <p>CA 2 Rec 5: Review, update, and disseminate to customers P-Patch operational policies and procedures</p>
	CA 3: Lack of communication and coordination with other City departments	<p>CA 3 Rec 1: Establish an IDT to include Parks, SDOT, SPU, SCL, FFD, and SPU, and meet biannually or as needed.</p> <p>CA 2 Rec 2: Establish MOUs between DON and other departments as guidelines for P-Patch development and operations.</p>
	CA 4: Administration of program data and procedures is inefficient	CA 4 Rec 1: Convert P-Patch database to web based system that can be used on site and by the public.
	CA 4: P-Patch communications and marketing is outdated and inaccessible for some populations	<p>CA 4 Rec 2: Update website for improved links to resources and other City initiatives related to P-Patches, Urban Agriculture, and Food Systems</p> <p>CA 4 Rec 3: Update communications materials, translate appropriate documents into top tier languages</p> <p>CA 4 Rec 3: Develop new outreach strategies for under-served and under-represented populations, including information gathering on reasons for lack of participation.</p>