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Come Grow With Us: An Action Plan for Morrow Community Garden

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Come Grow With Us: An Action Plan for Morrow Community Garden

By Tacita Georgetta Williams

Abstract

The Morrow Community Garden was established as part of the “Lifelong Communities” initiative through the city of Morrow, Georgia and the Atlanta Regional Commission in 2012. Since then, a club of gardeners has helped sustain the garden and expand its capacity from 14 garden beds to 32 and have provided neighborhood residents with an opportunity to grow their own produce and make donations to a local clinic. With only financial support from membership dues, unstable membership, and limited space the garden is in need of an action plan to help meet its goals. Food deserts are regions where residents have limited access to fresh, affordable produce. These areas are often characterized by high minority population and low-income. Community gardens can help alleviate the health risk burden felt by residents of food deserts. Through establishing a relation with the Morrow Community Garden Club members and identifying goals and available resources, an action plan was created to help aid the garden club in its efforts to stabilize membership, expand the garden, educate city residents and create a youth engagement program.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Community gardens have served different purposes throughout history. Whether it is to provide an avenue for individuals to create a source of income, grow their food during produce shortages, and/or be a part of social action to beautify communities, community gardens serve a purpose in our society worth preserving (Henderson & Hartsfield, 2009). Social byproducts of community gardens are increased social connection, youth engagement, and increased neighborhood aesthetics (Litt, Soobader, Turbin, Hale, Buchenau & Marshall, 2011). Recently, community gardens have been emerging in the Metro Atlanta area to beautify vacant lots and encourage healthy eating habits in communities. These community gardens come in all shapes, sizes, and organizational type (Arnold, 2015).

Community gardens can help alleviate the burdens of food deserts by providing a source of fresh produce and agricultural education. The health implications linked to food insecurity is a multifaceted social problem. At the intersections of class and race, hunger and food insecurity find themselves in the midst of health disparities among minorities and the impoverished. Health disparities prevalent among those living in food deserts are obesity, malnutrition, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia.

The purpose of this capstone project is to create an action plan with the Morrow Community Garden in Morrow, GA. The program will focus on (1) increasing member participation, (2) expanding the garden to new areas, (3) educating Morrow residents on gardening and healthy food consumption, and (4) engaging high school and college students in efforts to maintain the existing garden and/or create new gardens. By developing these four areas of the garden's programming, we hope to maximize the potential of the garden to address the health needs of Morrow residents as well as serve as the basis for future garden programming

in the area. This paper will review the population demographics of Clayton County and the city of Morrow in comparison to the state to determine the need for a community garden health program. The current operations of the Morrow community garden will provide a starting point for work that needs to be done to better organize the club.

Defining Food Deserts

A food desert is defined as an urban or rural area where the access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food is limited to residents. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a food desert on the basis of proximity to fresh, healthy, and affordable options by 1 mile in urban areas and 10 miles in rural areas. The difficulty in assessing affordability is introduced when population income is taken into consideration. A region can be considered low-income if it has (a) a poverty rate of 20 percent or greater, OR (b) a median family income at or below 80 percent of the area median family income. It can be further identified as low access if at least 500 persons and/or at least 33% of the census tract's population live more than one mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (10 miles, in the case of non-metropolitan census tracts) (USDA, 2015). In addition to distal proximity and income, an individual's access to a mode of transportation can adversely affect their access to healthy, affordable, foods. Typically, rural areas and areas with higher minority and low-income individuals are subject to fall within a food desert. These areas lack large, retail food markets and instead have disproportionate amounts of convenience stores that often have fewer healthy food choices (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015).

The residents of food deserts face diet based health burdens such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. In Clayton County specifically, the leading risk factor for premature death among residents is linked to few fruits and vegetables, followed by high blood pressure, lack of exercise,

and obesity (Community Health Status Report, 2010). All of these risk factors are dually related to each other and food insecurity.

Clayton County, Georgia, USA

Clayton County is a county located in the southern region of Metro-Atlanta, Georgia. The county is bordered by Fulton County to the northwest, DeKalb County to the northwest, Fayette County to the southeast, and Henry County to the southwest. It is one of the smallest counties in the state of Georgia. Over the years, Clayton County has experienced unique population growth and transportation changes. In addition, the county has faced an increase in health disparities including obesity rates.

The population of Clayton County has increased by 9.7% between the years 2000-2010. The population change in non-Hispanic whites, African-Americans, Asians, Hispanics and others has been -55.9%, 39.2%, 18.6%, 99.9%, and 60.1% respectively (US Census, 2010). Also, according to the 2010 census, there has been a 21.1% increase in the number of housing units, but a decrease in occupancy from 95.1% to 86.6% since 2000. In 2010, the total population of Clayton County was estimated to be 259,424. The trends in population indicate that non-Hispanic whites are moving out of the county, and the county is predominately minority inhabited. In terms of health, the county's adult obesity rate and diabetes rate is higher than the state's (City-Data, 2015). This finding is a reason for concern due to the county's large minority population and decreasing median income that could be placing residents at greater risk for health disparities.

Morrow, GA

According to the 2010 US Census data, Morrow, GA has a population size of 6,445 comprised mostly of African Americans (45%), Asians (25%), and Whites (22%). The estimated

median household income fell from \$46,569 in 2010 to \$41,818 (state average is \$47,209) and the city has experienced a population increase of 37.5% since 2010 to 2013 (City-Data, 2015). The city is home to Clayton State University, Morrow High school, and Morrow Community Garden.

Defining the Problem of Food Deserts in Clayton County

The limited access to fresh and affordable produce places a burden on residents of not being able to make healthy food choices. The lack of transportation in Clayton County combined with low-income residents creates the foundation for the food desert problem in the county. The following maps were created using the Atlanta Regional Commission's Interactive Mapping System that highlights the community health assets of Clayton County (Atlanta Regional Commission, 2014). In each map, the shades of purple highlight the poverty levels in Clayton County. The darker shades indicate higher levels of poverty and the lighter shades indicate lower levels. In Figure 1., the pink dots represent fast food outlets, and in Figure 2., the blue dots represent food marts and supermarkets (using the interactive map, majority of the blue dots were identified as food marts rather than super markets). The pink dots are more clustered together in areas of low-income, and many of the blue dots are food marts rather than supermarkets. Food marts often supply less fresh and nutritious foods at a higher price than supermarkets do (CDC, 2015). Figure 3. shows the locations of the community gardens that were formed with aid from the UGA Extension. The dark blue point is the demonstration garden located at the Clayton County Board of Health, and the yellow point is the Morrow Community Garden and the lighter blue point is the Lovejoy Community Garden. The demonstration plot at the Clayton County Board of Health is not currently in use. The Lovejoy Community Garden is a large, multi-acre garden that receives a lot of municipal support, receives grant funding, and gives away produce

to Clayton County residents. Unfortunately, this garden location is located in the southern region of the county and away from low-income areas.

These maps provide evidence that populations in Clayton County could possibly be food insecure due to the overlapping of low-income areas and areas that have higher access to fast foods or retail locations that have higher prices.

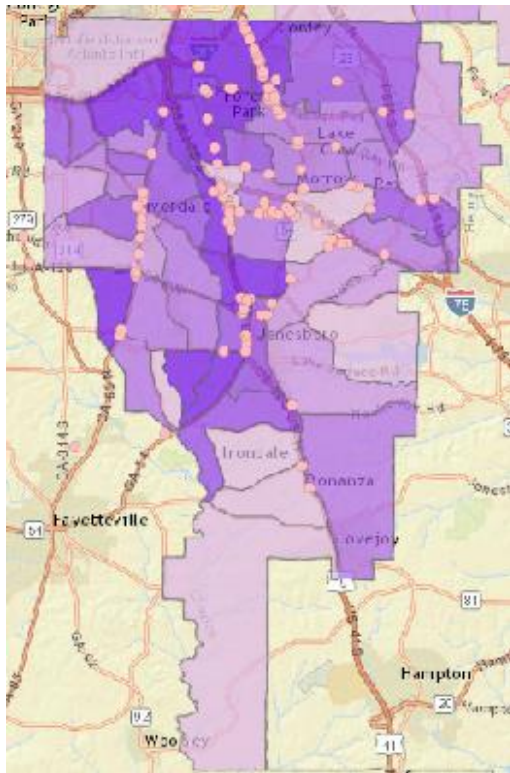


Figure 1. The shades of purple represent area poverty levels with deeper shades signifying higher rates. The pink dots represent fast food restaurants.

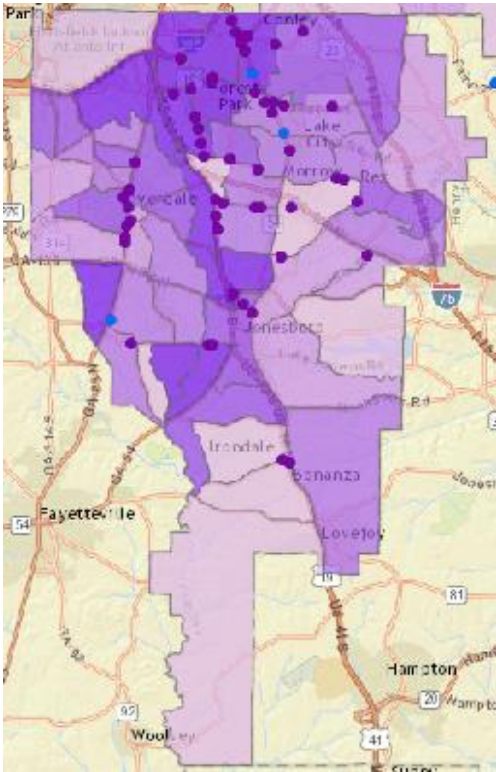


Figure 2. The purple dots represent food marts that typically have higher prices and less nutritional foods. The blue dots represent traditional super markets.

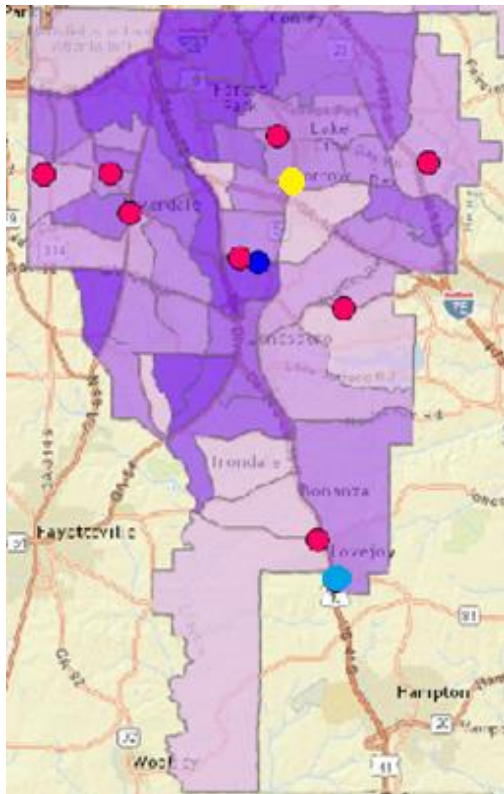


Figure 3. The pink dots represent a community garden that serves the general population. The dark blue point is the location of the demonstration at the Clayton county Board of Health that is not currently in use. The yellow point is the Morrow Community Garden and the light blue point is the Lovejoy Community Garden.

Morrow Community Garden

In 2011, The Clayton County Board of Health collaborated with the University of Georgia (UGA) College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) to begin new community gardens in Clayton County. From that project, 13 community garden sites were developed as of November 2012, including ADA accessible plant beds and beds at school/youth facilities. To date, there are 15 functioning community gardens through this collaboration. The gardens vary in size, function, and population served.

Each garden operates as its own entity and is provided agricultural consulting through the University of Georgia Extension services. The Extension program is a county, state, and federally funded organization supported by UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences and College of Family and Consumer Sciences (UGA Extension, 2015). Some of the gardens, like the Carl Rhodenizer Recreation Center and Lovejoy Community garden, are funded by and have support from the local government. Others, like the Morrow community garden, are maintained by community members. The social and health benefits of the growth and efficiency of community gardens are worth the effort of proper planning to ensure the perpetuity of gardens in Clayton County.

The Morrow Community Garden began in April 2012 through efforts with the City of Morrow and the Atlanta Regional Commission “Lifelong Communities” initiative and is maintained by a Garden Club led by Mrs. Cathy Turner (Yeomans, 2012). Turner and her club members have since then expanded the garden from 14 plant beds to 32 beds. The original 14 beds were 4’W x 12’L x 1’H. The members worked to raise each bed by 1’ to make them all 2’H. The added height makes it easier for older gardeners to access their plants without injury as well as allows for better drainage of water through the plant bed.

The garden occupies land on an old city park that was getting very little use near a former C-Tran (Clayton County public transportation system) route stop. Initial planners hoped that the 2012 transportation special-purpose local-option sales tax (TSPLOST) efforts would be voted in, and the garden would become an attractive stop for commuters. Unfortunately, that did not come to be, and the garden sits hidden away from regular traffic. In addition to its secluded location, it does not have a specific address.

Expansion of the garden has been through the efforts of the club members. The lumber for each bed is approximately \$200 and is funded by small grants and membership dues of \$10 per month. Currently with 32 beds, the garden is functioning at full capacity (30 member plots and two donation plots for Good Shepherd Clinic).

I sat with Mrs. Turner to discuss the goals the club has for the future of their garden. The first goal is to stabilize membership. During the spring and summer months, they have full membership but were down to eight members in the fall. One day Mrs. Turner hopes to have a wait list for the current location. In time, she hopes to receive access to more vacant city land to expand the garden to nearby property. A Farmer's Market would help generate attention towards the garden and open avenues for further community collaboration.

Also related to this effort, the club would like to engage in more fundraising and event planning efforts. The next goal is to educate Clayton County residents on gardening to either encourage participation in the community garden or to begin a garden at home. Lastly, the Morrow Garden Club would like to see the establishment of a Junior Master Gardener Program. The table below shows the discussed goals and possible solutions.

An action plan was deemed necessary to outline the garden club's goals and create a step-by-step approach to meeting defined objectives. The action plan will outline the necessary steps

required to begin work towards the goals and also provide the club with means by which to assess their progress. Defining their garden program and maintaining records will allow them to always have something to reference as well as document and publish their accomplishments to the public as well as be able to apply for grants and other sources of funding. The action plan will focus on stabilizing membership, expanding the garden location, educating Morrow residents and engaging high school and college students. These four goals were identified as factors that would help set the foundation towards meeting the other goals.

Table 1: Discussed Goals and Possible Solutions for Morrow Community Garden

| Goal | Possible Solution(s) |
|---|--|
| Stabilize Membership* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Create reduced fees in the low planting months ● Suggest fall planting activities (greenhouse planting or different produce) ● Implement an interview process to identify the level of gardening the applicant desires |
| Expand Location* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ask city for access to more vacant land ● Discuss utilizing campus land at Clayton State University |
| Farmer’s Market | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify scale of market desired ● Collaborate with established market in the area |
| Increase Event and Fundraising Activity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Begin with fundraising events ● Collaborate with other county gardens |
| Educate Clayton County Residents* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Utilize Clayton State campus space to teach classes on the weekend ● Utilize garden at Clayton County Board of health for demonstrations |
| Create a Junior Master Gardener Program (Begin with High School and College students) * | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with UGA extension office and surrounding Clayton County High Schools to potentially begin campus clubs |

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Health Benefits of Community Gardens

Past research has shown that community gardens impact communities and individuals. Individuals who participate in either a community garden or have a home garden report a greater consumption of fruits and vegetables, improved access to food, improved nutrition, increased physical activity, decreased cholesterol levels, and grocery savings ranging from \$50-\$250. Also, communities report residents having greater neighborhood pride, increased communication, decreased crime rates and increased community cohesion (Biru, Brietzke, Foreman, Awosika-Olumo, Sindha, Blakeney & Aikins, 2012).

Mary Stein, MSN (2008) supports the holistic, health-promoting behavior that community gardens provide. Poor, urban areas with limited resources often experience higher rates of chronic disease and access to stress-reducing activities such as regular exercise. This combination of risk and access leads to higher morbidity and mortality rates. Community gardens can be a source of holistic healthcare by providing residents with an avenue to healthy foods, social engagement, and physical activity. Stien stresses the point that community gardens impact both the physical and mental wellbeing of garden participants and helps fill the health gaps created by socioeconomic status.

The individual and community burden of food deserts is a subjective factor thus qualitative measures are often taken to evaluate the impact of community gardens. In her research titled *Growing what you eat: Developing community gardens in Baltimore, Maryland*, Michelle Corrigan (2011) conducted interviews with gardeners from a community garden in Baltimore, Maryland. She chose to focus on participants from this particular garden because the participants demonstrated being able to utilize and preserve the land the best out of the

community gardens in the area. The Duncan Street Miracle Garden was founded in 1988 by a local men's organization, Pharaoh's Club, which cleaned up an alleyway after the demolition of run down homes, and lobbied for the area to become fenced off to form a public gardening area. Corrigan began her research by identifying the bars/restaurants, supermarkets, liquor stores, corner stores, fast food, gas stations, and pharmacies in the area surrounding the community garden.

Corrigan then completed fieldwork to assess the quality and price of the food available in each of the establishments. The corner stores, gas stations, and pharmacies often offered a limited supply of fresh fruits and no vegetables and often at a higher price than the local supermarket. Limited selection coupled with high prices often led shoppers to opt for the less expensive sugary and less nutritional options.

She interviewed five of the community gardeners of which four were African-American males between the ages of 50-60. They accounted that the majority of their produce was grown on the farm, and they rarely shopped at the supermarket. However, when they had to, the cost of transportation to the local grocery store often ended up making the cost equal to shopping at the grocery store or gas station. The leading factor between making the trip to the grocery store versus paying more at the nearby corner store was that the grocery store would provide more options.

Corrigan also went on to identify ways other than creating food security that community gardens help. Community gardens increase the esthetics of an area, creating a heightened sense of moral for the community among community participants. Gardening creates a tradition that engages individuals of all ages. As more youth become involved in the process, the impact is

passed along to their parents and vice versa. The community garden's surplus produce is donated to local organizations, building collaboration and community engagement.

Although some gardens are created as government initiatives, Corrigan advises that the best gardens are created and run by community members in a "bottom-up" approach. The grassroots origins foster a sense of ownership and pride that gardeners maintain throughout the life of the garden.

This research provides vital information for assessing the food deserts in Clayton County and thinking of ways to utilize community gardens as a tool to create food security in those regions.

Researchers Feng Qiu Haoluan and Brent Swallow (2014) use GIS mapping and a combination of low food access and high need (low-income) to assess the amount of food security that existing community gardens provide to residents in Edmonton, Canada. Although their study found that the regions with the lowest access to supermarkets, community gardens, and farmer markets were actually in areas with higher income, the elderly population who may find it difficult to get access to transportation may have greater need for the service provided by community gardens and markets. Qiu Hoaluan and Swallow suggest lobbying for community gardens in areas with lower income and placing more emphasis on targeted programs such as Meals on Wheels to address the needs of the elderly population.

Community Engagement

The word "community" itself evokes a sense of societal cohesion. The history of community gardens in the United States goes as far back as the 1890's when vacant lots were occupied by unemployed citizens to grow their own produce and sell the excess for monetary gains.

(Henderson, B. R., & Hartsfield, K, 2009). This "Potato Patch Movement" would pave the way

for the use of community gardens to both address community needs as well as serve as mechanisms for social activism. During the 1970's, community members decided to beautify their New York City neighborhoods by transforming vacant, run down lots into community areas that would provide fresh produce and hopefully reduce the levels of crime, engage city youth, and combat rising obesity rates. From these small, centralized community efforts, a city-run community garden program flourished; Green Thumb. As attractive as the idea of a city-run community garden system may seem, there are factors that can influence the community's response. A community garden should meet five key areas: (1) a community need, (2) have the capacity to be sustained, (3) possess strong political and administrative support, (4) be allocated sufficient public land, and (5) be part of a multi-year commitment plan within the city. Often community members are disengaged from city efforts because of not feeling integrated with the programming. One way for local governments to achieve a level of trust is to supply the land, the initial startup funding, allot ongoing financial support, and additional funding resources, but also allow community members to individually maintain the sites. There are three identified ways in which local government can be of assistance to the sustainability of community gardens. City governments can allocate resources to existing community gardens run by third parties, collaborate with other government agencies and nonprofit organizations to co-develop community gardens, or create gardens "in-house" that are run solely by municipal government agencies.

Youth Engagement

Stephanie Fulford & Shirley Thompson (2013) analyzed a youth urban gardening program to examine the social, personal, and health benefits. The Youth for EcoAction (YEA) program is a project of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg that targets low-income, at-risk

youth. At risk is defined as likely to fall victim to the lure of gang relations, drug use, crime, and incompleteness of school. The program began as an after school program geared towards youth between the ages of 9-18. Through collaborations with local schools, a farm, and organizations, the program was able to expand to offer internships and development opportunities. A qualitative analysis comprised of observation and interviews of seven program interns and three Boys and Girls Club staff resulted in evidence that there were positive impacts in the areas of skill building and job training, self-esteem, nutrition and food security, environmental awareness and behavior, and community building on both the effect on youth participants and community at large. One major takeaway from the YEA program in the “Circle of Courage” model used to help entice positive change in youth.

The “Circle of Courage” model was first introduced by authors Larry Brendtro, Martin Brokenleg, and Steve Van Bockern in their book *Reclaiming Youth at Risk*. This four-point model combines the philosophies of Native American child-rearing, heritage of early pioneers in education and youth work, and contemporary resilience research and combines the four universal growth needs of all children: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. These four areas should be addressed when creating a program geared towards at-risk youth. (*Reclaiming Youth Network*, 2015).

Service learning introduces an educational and reflective component to community volunteering (Sabo, de Zapien, Teufel-Shone, Rosales, Bergsma, & Taren, 2015). Service learning is a multi-step approach to civic engagement that takes students through the perpetration, action, reflection and celebration of their service (P.A.R.C.). Thus, adding a deeper connection between student and service. This creation of personal investment to gardening is part of what Pierre Walter (2013) describes in his theory around utilizing community gardens as

pedagogical sites in the food movement. Community gardens are educating participants in five ways- formal, informal, self-directed, incidental and non-formal learning- which mirror the learning routes observed in social movements. Community gardens also increase social capital.

Chapter III: Community Garden Program Proposal

As an urban city with a predominately minority population experiencing decreasing median income, Morrow would benefit from expansion of the Morrow Community Garden. An action plan was developed to address the specific goals of the garden in conjunction with the intent and purpose to maximize the ability of the garden to help offset the burdens of food deserts in the area. In addition to the action plan, objectives and measures of evaluation are defined.

Action Plan for Morrow Community Garden

An action plan was chosen as the best method to approach the planning of the garden program because it provides a clear outline of objectives, necessary actions and resources needed, and can be used as a way to track progress. The Morrow Community Garden is already established but needs a clear outline of direction. The garden club's goals needed to be outlined by priority level, number of resources and assigned specific levels of measurement. By creating an action plan with objectives that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound (SMART), the garden club will have a complete and clear outline of tasks that need to be completed and be updated to reflect current progress. Additional benefits of creating an action plan include being able to provide potential partners and grantors with a clear direction of the organization, ensuring that all project details are outlined, saving time, energy and resources, and having a way to hold organization members accountable for specific tasks. (Community Took Kit, 2015).

For purposes of this capstone, emphasis will be placed on the goals to stabilize membership, expand garden location, educate Morrow residents, and to engage high school and college students. The Morrow Community Garden was identified as the subject of the

community action plan due to members of the community sustaining the garden, its location near a university and its progress over the years. The plan will encompass improving current efforts and implementing new ones based on proven volunteer and civic engagement methods. The proposed program and action plan should be revisited often and revised if it is determined to not be meeting the needs of the garden and/or the community (Jermé & Wakefield, 2013).

The SMART objectives were developed using the CDC's SMART (CDC, 2011) objective template and program components are recommendations based off of available resources and current operational capacity of the garden club.

Stabilizing Membership

Often a lack of participation in community organizations stems from a lack of identity. Establishing a mission and vision for an organization is a good first step towards creating an organizational identity. Having speaking points for the organization not only helps connect members to the organization but will make it easier for members to share information uniformly and consistently to the public (Hawthorne, 2015). The following is a proposed mission and vision statement for the Morrow Community Garden:

Vision: Morrow City residents will have access to fresh, healthy produce grown in their neighborhood.

Mission: To educate and engage Morrow city residents and guests in the community and individual gardening.

Another suggestion to help stabilize membership is to require gardeners to complete an application. This application can help identify the specific needs of gardeners and help the club better serve them (McKelvey, 2014). Applicants would be required to provide information about their scope of need and use for a garden plot and how they intend to utilize the space.

It was expressed that membership numbers vary throughout the year; higher during the spring and summer and lower in the winter. Community gardening is a social experience that requires extra planning to establish a greater sense of participation outside of the individual benefits. Common volunteer engagement strategies include holding meetings regularly, volunteer recognition, and supplementary literature (CharityVillage, 2015). Currently, the Morrow Community garden holds meetings twice a month on the first and third Saturday of the month. The club gardeners should begin utilizing social media platforms (King, 2012). Communication can be enhanced by utilizing an email service such as MailChimp. For accounts that service less than 2,000 participants, the service is free. Social media is a major tool for public communication. The garden club should create a Facebook profile and designate at least one person to be responsible for the regular postings on the page. The page administrator should also allow current paid members or an executive board to be admins to the site. This page can be used to recruit and track members as well as promote events. Another cost efficient recruitment tool is the Clayton Daily News, a newspaper serving Clayton County. An ad should be placed in the local paper to help recruit members and bring attention to the garden.

Identifying the trends in membership numbers also aids in creating strategies to help retain members. Since it has be acknowledged that membership lessens during the fall and winter, it would be an ideal time to hold social events, fundraising events, and promote special crop growing (like pumpkins) during these months. These events will maintain community visibility and create a social tie to the community garden outside of growing/harvesting season. Ongoing event planning relies on member participation, so increasing efforts to engage garden members is crucial to the year-round functioning of the garden.

Membership should be tracked to assess the rates on new membership, the number of continuing members and the regularity of membership. Members that seem to fall through the cracks should be contacted to identify reasons for a lack of participation. This will show an attempt to reconcile issues as well as express sentiment and create another bond between participant and garden club.

Expanding Garden Locations

The current location of the Morrow Community Garden is located at a former C-tran stop and former city park. The land lot is almost at full capacity with 32 plant beds. The first step in expanding the garden location is to establish the need to do so. With membership currently unstable, the garden club should work on recruitment efforts. No other recruitment has been conducted since the initial formation of the garden. Quarterly information sessions should be held to identify new gardeners. Field canvassing efforts to promote the meetings would be a cost efficient and effective method to promote the meeting. These canvassing efforts can be door to door or simply leaving an eye-catching flyer for the event. It is suggested to do a mixture of both. Attempting to make contact door to door when individuals are home and also leaving behind an invitation to the meetings. Asking local government offices, schools, and grocery stores to post a flyer for the meeting would also help visibility of the event. Creating multiple avenues for visibility is important for event promotion. To establish which method works best, a survey should be administered at the meetings to identify the most effective recruitment methods.

After a substantial need for expansion is identified, then work to expand the garden should begin. Potential land should be easily accessible to Morrow residents. The UGA Extension office would be helpful in conducting a soil testing of the land, and then land

preparation should begin. Garden members should work with the local city officials to identify vacant city lots that could be used as future garden locations.

Based on the cost of lumber for each of the gardens (\$200), it is suggested that the city of Morrow allot \$2,000 towards the cost of 10 new garden plots. The additional funding from the City would create a line of support between the garden and the municipality. Other sources of funding should be solicited through identifying community sponsors such as organizations and businesses. Increasing the amount of stakeholders will aid in the efforts to sustain the community garden.

Educate Morrow Residents

Cathy Turner of the Morrow Community Garden would like to encourage Morrow residents to have either a plot in the community garden or a home garden. A curriculum should be outlined to identify classes that would benefit city residents. The garden club would like to encourage Morrow residents to begin their own home gardens. It would also be beneficial to combine the act of gardening with nutritional knowledge and food preparation ideas. Topics that may be addressed are: “Gardening 101”, “Eating What You Grow”, “Eating More Colors”, “Nutrition 101”, and “Savvy Shopping: Reading Labels and Price Tags”.

Having a functional time that would be attractive and convenient for residents is also important when planning educational classes. Saturday mornings and weekday afternoons tend to be a convenient time for individuals to attend educational classes. Depending on the type of class, the location can vary. Demonstration classes can be held at the community garden location, and informational classes can be held at the Morrow City Hall Community Room.

As mentioned, community gardens can be used as a teaching site. Hands-on, instructional sessions tend to be more attractive than lecture style classes (Costa, Van Rensburg & Rushton,

2007). The demand for instructional classes may also increase demand for garden expansion and help to stabilize membership.

Engage College and High School Students

Student groups can help maintain the Morrow Community Garden, as well as assist in the expansion and planning and promotion of events. A major function of young adult engagement is the idea of service learning. By combining meaningful community service with teaching and learning components, the Morrow Community Garden can utilize college and high school students to sustain. There is not currently any type of horticulture club at either Morrow High School or Clayton State University.

Garden members can collaborate with Clayton State University and Morrow High School officials to establish interest in forming a campus gardening club. Information should be sent through email to Clayton State University students about an informational meeting. The school counselor at Morrow High School should be contacted to learn more about beginning a student club. The UGA Extension office will be contacted to learn more about the Master Gardener program and ways to get students involved and certified.

Prior to the meetings, it should be established to what extent students will be responsible in helping the garden. To begin, high school students should attend informational “classes” once or twice a month to learn the basics of gardening. Then there can be efforts to create a plot on the high school grounds.

The same goes for the students at Clayton State as well as participating more regularly with the garden members due to the campus being within walking distance to the garden. There should also then be efforts made to create a garden on the grounds of the University. The establishment of campus gardens will come with growing interest and demand.

One major way students in both high school and college can be utilized is helping with program planning efforts and canvassing. Participation in these activities not only meets service learning initiatives, but also helps develop skills that can be listed on resumes. Having varying incentives is important when trying to engage high school and college students (The Case Foundation, 2015). College students can potentially help the club tackle one of its other goals- to begin a Junior Master Gardener program.

Morrow High School is a predominantly minority school (72% Black, 10% Asian and 11% Hispanic) with a high percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch (78%) (U.S. News & World Report, 2015). In conjunction with the above factors, the students do not perform well in testing. Beginning a horticultural club that utilizes the “Circle of Courage” model, could help some students achieve more academically and socially.

Clayton State University has a strong, growing civic engagement program and multiple student groups that encourage community engagement. The Student Life Department has provided students with an opportunity to volunteer with the Morrow Community Garden in the past and the likelihood that a group of students can be identified to create a club on campus is high. The club may also be able to work in conjunction with the “Laker Care Closet” initiative to help provide basic needs of food and clothing to students in need.

Chapter IV: Limitations and Future Considerations

The Morrow Community Garden is only one of many gardens in Clayton County. Each garden operates autonomously and serves different purposes and populations. This action plan is an adaptation of previous community garden programs established within a certain government jurisdiction and aims to serve the general public. Action plans for other gardens would need to be modified to meet specific garden needs and goals.

The success of the action plan is contingent on resident participation. It is very important for the garden club to continuously analyze the need of the garden in the community. If current efforts do not generate demand from the population, club members must evaluate how to change the focus of the program. By tracking participation at information sessions and creating survey questions that address resident interests, will aid the club members in on-going evaluation.

The intent is that the members of the Morrow Community Garden club will take the suggestions outlined in the action plan into consideration and begin to utilize this format in their future. Having a clear plan will ensure that the garden is sustainable and will create the foundation for future evaluation of the health benefits being provided by the community garden.

Despite differing purposes and target populations, garden networks that are able to collaborate and share resources are often beneficial to sustaining gardens. For instance, Green Thumb in New York City is a city initiative supported by the local Parks and Recreation that serves as a resource to the community gardens in the area. It has no direct governance over the operation of the gardens but allows for NYC residents to access information on the community gardens in the area. This centralized database of information is beneficial in helping to connect community members with volunteer opportunities, gardens in their area, and information on beginning their own garden.

The Clayton County officials in conjunction with the UGA Extension office in Clayton County should work to gather information on existing community gardens in the county and publish information that would include the location, contact information, and population served of each garden. This information would help those seeking information find it easily and help gardens reach a greater population. From this page, visitors would also be able to locate information on the UGA Extension office location and Master Gardener Program. A strong online presence is becoming more and more crucial to organizational sustainability.

Some things left to consider is the lack of public transportation in Clayton County and how to acquire land for garden expansion. The Metro Atlanta Rapid Transportation Authority (MARTA) began servicing Clayton County again in spring 2015. Currently, there are only two routes. However, as community gardens grow and service more county residents, routes may begin to service gardens directly. This would help residents who have limited access to fresh produce. Land used for community gardens should undergo proper soil testing. Environmental factors such as exposure to pollutants should also be considered when it is time to expand the garden location.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Morrow, Georgia could benefit from expansion of the Morrow Community Garden. The garden will be able to provide residents with a source of fresh produce, agriculture and nutrition education, promote physical activity, and engage high school and college students in sustaining community gardens. Through these efforts, hopefully, residents will begin to make healthier food choices. The success will be reflected in health records as well as self-reported answers through the garden's evaluation efforts.

Successful community garden planning and maintenance is not something that will happen overnight. With a stable foundation of interested persons, community support, and flexibility to change and grow, community gardens can have a lasting impact on communities in which they serve. The Morrow Community Garden has been able to maintain and expand with limited outside support since its establishment in 2012. With a few changes and utilizing community resources, the garden will be able to expand even more and begin to pursue their goals.

Volunteer recruitment and retention are tasks many community organizations find difficult. By establishing a sense of identity through a vision and mission statement, the garden club will provide its members with an avenue to connect with the future of the garden. By being innovative in communication, event planning efforts, and volunteer recognition, the garden club will be able to maintain stable membership.

Expansion efforts for the garden can begin when increased demand is established. The demand can become greater by increasing the public presence of the garden. The more people know about it, the more people may want to get involved. The Morrow Community Garden has come a long way and can continue to grow as long as the action plan is followed, and the results

of each step are recorded and analyzed. This proposed action plan is only a starting point and is expected to be changed as the garden develops and functional capacity increases.

The strengthening of the Morrow Community Garden's operations and community program will allow for the garden to function as a source of relief against food deserts and food insecurity in the area. By creating a community garden program with set objectives and goals, the garden will transform from a garden club into a factor that will help determine health outcomes for Morrow residents. Through a combination of education and engagement, the garden will provide community members with access to fresh produce, a form of physical activity, a way to save on groceries, and a way to connect with their community through social interaction.

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Appendix A: SMART Objective (Adapted from the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control)

| Not-so-SMART objective 1a: To Stabilize Membership | |
|--|---|
| Key Component | Objective |
| Specific - What is the specific task? | Have the same amount of members year round |
| Measurable - What are the standards or parameters? | Number of club members by season |
| Achievable - Is the task feasible? | Yes, extra programming will need to be implemented to create incentive for year round membership. |
| Realistic - Are sufficient resources available? | Yes. The garden has the lot capacity to have year-round membership |
| Time-Bound - What are the start and end dates? | 1 year- Membership counted at the beginning of each season |
| SMART objective 1a: To maintain a membership roster between 25-30 participants during each season yearly. | |

| Not-so-SMART objective 2a: Establish need for garden expansion | |
|--|--|
| Key Component | Objective |
| Specific - What is the specific task? | To identify new community members interested in community gardening. |
| Measurable - What are the standards or parameters? | At least 10 new gardeners expressing interest in at least planting for two seasons. |
| Achievable - Is the task feasible? | Yes, as long as club members are willing to canvass and hold recruitment meetings. |
| Realistic - Are sufficient resources available? | Maybe. The biggest expense will be to print flyers. Club members can either divide the costs among themselves or utilize city resources if possible. |
| Time-Bound - What are the start and end dates? | Hold one recruitment meeting monthly for six months. |
| SMART objective 2a: In the next six months, identify at least 10 new gardeners interested in at least planting for two seasons. | |

| Not-so-SMART objective 3a: Educate Morrow residents on community gardening and healthy food consumption | |
|--|--|
| Key Component | Objective |
| Specific - What is the specific task? | To encourage Morrow residents to grow their own food and eat healthier food items |
| Measurable - What are the standards or parameters? | Number of classes taught and number of class participants |
| Achievable - Is the task feasible? | Yes. Club members can teach a class or partner with community organizations to provide the instructional component |
| Realistic - Are sufficient resources available? | Yes. |
| Time-Bound - What are | Classes should be offered bi weekly for six months <i>after</i> the first six |

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| the start and end dates? | months of recruitment. |
| SMART objective 3a: In the six months following the recruitment period, the garden club will engage at least 5 community members per class over a six month period of offering one class every other week. | |

| Not-so-SMART objective 4a: Create a garden club at Clayton State University and Morrow High School. | |
|---|--|
| Key Component | Objective |
| Specific - What is the specific task? | Engage college and high students in community gardening efforts of Morrow Community Garden |
| Measurable - What are the standards or parameters? | Number of members in the established clubs. At least 7 in each. |
| Achievable - Is the task feasible? | Yes. |
| Realistic - Are sufficient resources available? | Yes. As long as there is a faculty/staff advisor for each club. |
| Time-Bound - What are the start and end dates? | Recruitment will begin in the fall (August/September) with complete club formation by October. |
| SMART objective 4a: By the end of October 2015, there will be a garden club with at least 7 members at both Clayton State University and Morrow High School. | |

| Not-so-SMART objective 4b: Expand community gardens | |
|--|--|
| Key Component | Objective |
| Specific - What is the specific task? | Establish a community garden on the campus of Clayton State University and Morrow High School. |
| Measurable - What are the standards or | 1 new garden on each campus |

| | |
|---|---|
| parameters? | |
| Achievable - Is the task feasible? | Yes, as long as space is available and administration is in agreement |
| Realistic - Are sufficient resources available? | Yes. Soil testing may be required as well as raising funds to build the garden. |
| Time-Bound - What are the start and end dates? | One year from club establishment |
| SMART objective 4b: By Fall 2016 there will be one garden site at Morrow High School and one garden site at Clayton State University maintained by students. | |

Appendix B: Action Plan

| Goal | Tasks | Time Frame | Completion Notes/Follow-up | Resources Needed |
|---|--|--|----------------------------|--|
| Stabilize Membership | <input type="checkbox"/> Create File with running list of member information <input type="checkbox"/> Vote on seasonal membership dues <input type="checkbox"/> Identify fall/winter produce ideas <input type="checkbox"/> Identify interest meeting space and begin promotion | <p>-Within a Month</p> <p>-As soon as possible</p> <p>-Within a Month</p> <p>-As soon as possible</p> | | MailChimp Account Facebook Account Google Email Account |
| Expand Location | <input type="checkbox"/> Establish need <input type="checkbox"/> Contact City Planner | <p>-Within the next six months</p> <p>-Within a Month of establishing need</p> | | Meetings Space for Interest Meetings Printing Services for flyers Establish Canvassing Team |
| Educate Clayton County Residents | <input type="checkbox"/> Contact organizations for educational space and/or promotional assistance <input type="checkbox"/> Contact UGA Extension Office to Inquire about Master Gardener Program | <p>-As soon as possible</p> <p>-As soon as possible</p> | | Morrow City Hall: (770) 961-4002 Clayton State Facilities: (678) 466-4000 Clayton County Board of Health: (678) 610-7199 |
| Engage College and High School Students | <input type="checkbox"/> Begin efforts to begin a school club/chapter | <p>-Contact School representative as soon as possible and begin holding informational meetings at the beginning of the Fall semester</p> | | Morrow High School: 770-473-3241 ext 503137 or juliet.walls@clayton.k12.ga.us Clayton State University: (678) 466 - 5433 |

COME GROW WITH US

MORROW COMMUNITY GARDEN

Informational Meeting

Are you interested in learning more about the Morrow Community Garden and ways to get involved? If so, join us for an informational meeting.

Date:

Time:

Location:

Contact:

Like Us on Facebook!



Morrow Community Garden Membership Application Form

Name: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Address: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Phone: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Email: [Click here to enter text.](#)

How did you hear about the garden? [Click here to enter text.](#)

During which seasons are you interested in planting: Spring Summer Fall Winter

Are you a returning member? Yes No

What level experience do you have gardening? Beginner Intermediate Expert

May we share your contact information with other garden members? Yes No

Do you authorize the Morrow Community Garden to use pictures taken of you on public sites?
Yes No

Member Signature: _____ Date: _____