

## **Mountair Park Community Farm**

### **Background and Goals**

Throughout the years, the City of Lakewood has sustained a number of initiatives and strategies to provide a foundation for healthy, resilient communities and has formed partnerships with a variety of organizations and municipalities to implement these initiatives. One such partnership is the West Line Corridor Collaborative (WLCC), a multi-jurisdictional nonprofit partnership of the cities of Lakewood and Denver, Metro West Housing Solutions, and the Denver Housing Authority. The WLCC's mission is to attract investment and support livable communities along the West Line light rail corridor. The WLCC is a partner in the HUD funded DRCOG Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI) and is overseeing the Sheridan Station Catalytic Project/20 Minute Neighborhood Implementation Strategy effort.

The 20 minute neighborhood strategy involves creating and enhancing neighborhoods where residents have safe, convenient access by walking or bicycling within 20 minutes to many of the places and services they use daily, utilizing the Sheridan transit station area as a hub. In addition to improving the sidewalk and bicycle network, one of the primary project goals is to increase access to healthy food for people living and working near the Sheridan Station, an area designated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a "food desert" by identifying critical food access partners and locations for fresh food production, packaging, and sales.

Community participants in the 20 minute neighborhood process have extensively discussed the need and desire for better access to fresh, healthy food in this area, as well as the desire for a community gathering space. The Mountair Park Community Farm will be catalytic in helping to achieve both of these goals and will be an early implementation step of this planning effort. The farm will promote healthy food access, ecological stewardship and education, and community pride as well as provide opportunities for neighborhood participation and awareness for the greater community.

To help implement the goal of providing better access to healthy food for residents near the Sheridan Station, the City of Lakewood submitted a letter of interest to Sprout City Farms (SCF) in October 2013 in response to a request for proposal (RFP) to enter into an urban farming partnership with SCF. The letter of interest outlined the reasons why the farm would be a great fit in this community, and it identified many community organizations that would benefit from the farm partnership. After reviewing a number of applications, SCF selected the Mountair Park site in Lakewood for its next urban farming partnership.

### **Sprout City Farms**

Sprout City Farms is a nonprofit organization that believes a thriving local food system is the foundation for healthy, resilient communities. SCF currently operates an urban farm at the Denver Green School. The farm is managed by one seasonal farmer, an employee of SCF whose job is to manage farm operations. Based on the business model from the flagship farm at the Denver Green School, income from Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shares pays for farm operations by year three. In its first year and based on a limited harvest, SCF will offer 20 paid CSA shares, five work shares, where 50

percent of the fee is reimbursed after 34 work hours completed, and five free shares to income-qualified members of the local community. SCF uses grant funding, sponsorship and donations to cover costs of education and ongoing programs and to subsidize farm operations until the CSA program is able to sustain it. Each week during the harvest season, SCF will operate a donation-based farm stand near the farm. The stand will suggest donations based on market value, but community members are able to “pay what they can” for produce grown at their community farm. The farm stand will also accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits.

SCF’s core values include the following areas:

*Healthy Food Access:* To develop healthier individuals, families, and communities, all people should have access to fresh, locally grown, organic foods.

*Education, Participation, and Awareness:* Everyone should know where their food comes from, as well as have access to opportunities to learn how to produce it themselves. By visiting or participating in a community farm, people will expand their food knowledge, increasing the likelihood of making healthy food choices. We believe that this will encourage the development of policies that support the future viability of a sustainable and fair urban farming economy.

*Ecological Stewardship:* In order to support the long-term sustainability of initiatives that seek to address food security, farming methods need to appropriately harmonize with the local ecosystem.

### **What is an Urban Farm?**

An urban farm is a food production site, usually managed by paid staff with the help of interns, students and volunteers. The food produced is typically given away to those who provide labor, given to community members in need or sold to local residents and businesses. While providing access to healthy food is a key component of the urban farm’s existence, it is not the entire benefit. The opportunity for communitywide education regarding food production and land use is as important to the foundation of a healthy, resilient community. The educational and philanthropic benefit an urban farm brings to a neighborhood supports the development of such an amenity if the immediate community is likely to engage in activities at the site.

### **Urban Farm Zoning**

Based on the most recently proposed zoning changes brought for first reading to City Council on January 27, 2014, urban farming will fall under the description of *horticulture*. Horticulture is defined as “the cultivation of fruits, flowers, vegetables, or plants.” Horticulture is an accessory use in all zone districts.

### **Mountair Park**

Mountair Park is a 9.7 acre City of Lakewood neighborhood park located at West 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Depew Street situated in the Two Creeks neighborhood. It was built by the Mountair Park District in the late 1950s or early 1960s and taken over by the City of Lakewood in 1970. Since that time, the City has

expanded the park and renovated its facilities. Current park amenities include a ball field, a playground, and a basketball court. (Exhibit A)

### **Proposed Mountair Park Community Farm**

The proposed farm will use slightly more than one acre on the south side of Mountair Park, and it will be adjacent to the newly opened West Line light rail and bike path that follows Dry Gulch, with direct visibility from both. City of Lakewood staff and Two Creeks neighborhood residents have had informal discussions for some time about how to better use this southeastern portion of the park.

Staff presented the proposed site and farm concept at the Two Creeks Board Meeting on November 16, 2013, and the idea was enthusiastically embraced. As of January 29, 12 area residents and partner agency representatives have volunteered to serve on the Community Farm Advisory Group, which will guide the direction and development of farm programs and food donation. The farm is scheduled to break ground on Tuesday, March 18, 2014.

The Mountair Park Community Farm creates numerous opportunities for collaboration on healthy food access and education with community partners in the area including Molholm Elementary School, Lakewood Head Start, Lamar Station Crossing Apartments/Metro West Housing Solutions, Mountair Christian Church, and others. In 2010, a Head Start Community Assessment was conducted and results indicated that parents and community members had concerns about finding adequate nutrition services in northeast Lakewood.

Educational opportunities are expected to expand over the course of the first three years at the site. Education is a critical component of the farm's ability to be successful in meeting its goals. Program choices are driven by the community members via their representatives on the Community Advisory Group. Examples of education and outreach could include programs such as school field trips geared toward different areas of curriculum, cooking demonstrations, composting clinics, community picnics and other social events.

### **Site layout**

The farm site is currently bisected by a basketball court. The area to the east of the court will be used for food production and will be developed as phase one of the project. The area west of the court could be used for community gardens, educational programs and gathering spaces or small terraced teaching gardens. The programs for this area will be determined in conjunction with the Community Advisory Group and will be developed as phase two of the project

The basketball court is not in good condition, and it is possible that it could be moved to allow for farm expansion and additional food production. At a well-attended public meeting on January 23, 2014, attendees were enthusiastic about expanding the farm into this space during initial farm construction. Some attendees proposed removing the existing court and relocating it with either a full- size or smaller court in a more northerly location in the park to be closer to the playground, parking lot and proposed

picnic shelter. The City will continue to work through the final park design and layout with the community as this process moves forward. (Exhibit B)

**Estimated Costs to the City**

The City is responsible for the construction of a fence around the farm, providing a power connection to the cold storage farm shed, and a farm sign. Those costs are outlined in the table below. Ongoing costs to the City include electricity (\$420/year), one port-o-let (\$1,152/year), trash pickup, and water (\$550-\$864/year, depending on final size of production area). Trash pickup costs will be minimal as the two receptacles will be emptied as part of normal park operations, adding very little additional labor to the existing program. Water costs are based on actual water usage during a growing season at the SCF Denver Green School Farm of 188,000 gallons on one acre. For additional reference, the City spent \$11,820.15 to water Mountair Park in 2013.

**Estimated Construction Costs to the City**

The amount of \$75,000 had been allocated for Mountair Park improvements from the Department of Community Resources Conservation Trust funds in 2014 in the site and facility account. These funds are used annually for park improvement projects across the system. Funding in the amount of \$5,000 had also been allocated from the Community Resources Conservation Trust infrastructure account to perform court crack sealing and color coating; however, in our recent review of the court condition, we have determined that court replacement will be a better option. The table below shows costs associated with the farm construction and other park improvements.

<b>Expense</b>	<b>Estimated cost low</b>	<b>Estimated cost high</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Court removal	\$5,000	\$5,000	
Smaller/multi-use court Construction	\$35,000	\$35,000	Anticipates new location in the park closer to parking lot and visible from 14 <sup>th</sup>
Fence surrounding farm	\$4,000	\$5,000	Similar to Ute Trail fence
Power drop to farm	\$5,000	\$6,500	Xcel
Farm sign	\$2,200	\$2,500	
TOTAL – Farm only	\$11,200	\$14,000	
TOTAL – Farm with removing and replacing bb court with smaller multiuse court	\$51,200	\$54,000	Similar to new court at Hodgson Park – has been very well received and well used.

**Updated information – November 3, 2014**

Actual costs for phase I improvements to the park (namely, the farm) completed between March and June, 2014 are as follows:

Court removal - \$0.00

Fence surrounding farm - \$8,767

Power drop by Excel Energy - \$13,140

Sign - \$2,979

Additional improvements to Mountair Park were approved within the 2014 revised/2015 budget. Those additions include a sport court, a picnic shelter, and two port-o-let enclosures. These improvements should be completed by spring, 2015.