



Gardening on Rental Property: Findings from Renters and Property Owners

August, 2014

Background

Gardening Matters is working in partnership with the City of Minneapolis and the Statewide Health Improvement Program to make gardening on rental property easier for both property owners and renters. In south Minneapolis, there are a large number of single-family rental properties with land that could be available for a garden if the landlord would allow it. Gardeners have expressed the need to explore ways to effectively communicate with their landlord regarding the benefits of having a garden and assistance with negotiating with their landlords to use available yard space for a garden.

Process

To identify the types of tools and information most needed by property owners and renters, Gardening Matters conducted two listening sessions and solicited written feedback online from both property owners and renters. Gardening Matters recruited renters and landlords via:

Email

- Targeted email and reminder to list of 248 property owners, provided by the City of Minneapolis
- Invitations to Waite House constituents, in English and Spanish

Invitation

- Posted online:
 - COMGAR, the community garden listserv that reaches over 2,000 subscribers
 - Phillips and Powderhorn e-democracy forums
 - Powderhorn, Central, Corcoran, Standish-Ericsson, and Bryant neighborhood organizations e-newsletters
 - Featured in Gardening Matters June e-newsletter that reaches over 2,000 subscribers
- Posted hard copies:
 - Waite House produce distribution and community bulletin boards in English and Spanish

Flier

- Posted in Powderhorn, Central, Corcoran, Standish-Ericsson, and Bryant neighborhood organizations

Online/Social Media

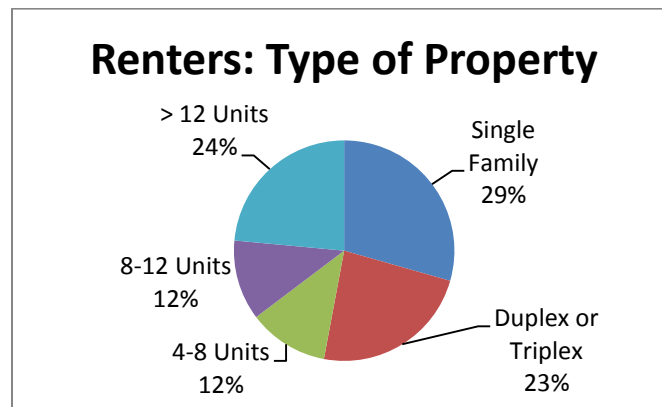
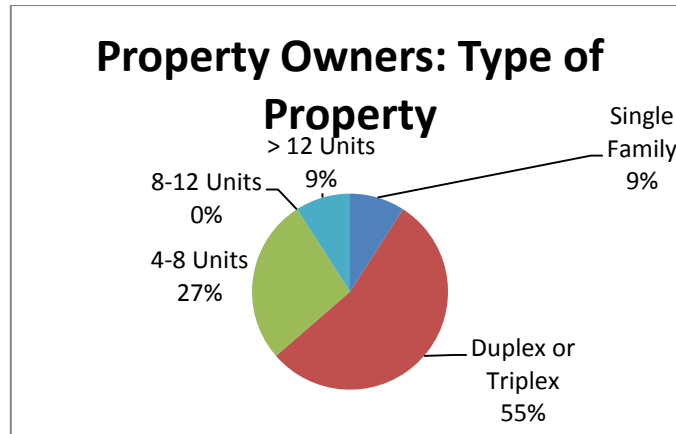
- Posted on Gardening Matters' website homepage
- Included on Gardening Matters' urban agriculture calendar of events
- Facebook post "boosted" to include all Minneapolis "friends" and "friends of friends" of Gardening Matters, which reaches over 3,600 people. Reminders posted.
- Facebook post also tweeted and reminders posted.

Written survey invitations were included in all communications, and reminders were sent to all who registered.



Summary of Feedback

Overall, 29 people provided feedback, which is reflected in this report. Six renters and seven property owners participated in the listening sessions, and eleven renters and five property owners responded to the written survey.



Note

In general, property owners are tentatively supportive of gardens; their primary concern is the maintenance of the garden. If a garden is not properly maintained, it would decrease the curb appeal of their property and the maintenance burden would fall onto them. They are open to sample lease agreements, ground rules, and other communication tools that would help them set gardening parameters with their renters. They would also appreciate some sort of incentive or recognition to highlight their willingness to allow gardens and highlight the gardens as a benefit to properties.

Renters are sometimes hesitant to approach their landlords to ask permission to garden and also welcome communication tools to help negotiate a garden agreement. Though they are willing to contribute time and materials to the garden, they hope a property owner would contribute funds to establish permanent structures that benefit the property (e.g. raised beds or rain barrels). It is important to note that this particular group of renters are already interested in gardening on rental property and are likely more experienced in gardening as well.



Concerns or challenges

<u>Property Owners</u>	<u>Renters</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic concerns: “one person’s beauty is another’s mess.” • Maintenance concerns: What happens if the garden isn’t taken care of? • Neighbors not supportive of the appearance • City inspectors not supportive • Concerns about soil health and liability • “All unknowns” are barriers to property owners, and property owners need to protect their investment • Concerns about water abuse or cost of water • Concerns that renters don’t know what they are doing and they don’t want them to fail at a gardening experiment, just because it’s trendy. It’s hard work too 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not having a direct connection or contact with the owner, or not knowing who to ask (especially for larger buildings) • Property owners who don’t care for their property are difficult to communicate with; any request is seen as a burden • If the renter is not going to stay in the unit for a long time, it’s hard to make the investment, both in time and money • Property owner doesn’t see the benefit or doesn’t understand gardening; as a result, it is hard to make the case for allowing it • Property owner is invested in having well-kept grass • Uncertainty about soil contamination or soil health

Benefits

<u>Property Owners</u>	<u>Renters</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coolness and “wow” factor of garden space is a great marketing tool • Creating a relationship with renters that leads to longer-term renters and community among residents. Happy residents = happy property owner • Has the potential to make the property much more attractive if cared for well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of fresh produce, lower food cost • Birds, bees, wildlife in an urban setting • If it’s a group garden, community in the building. • Good gardeners provide a service to their property owners, doing a lot of the yard work, keeping plants looking nice, and increasing property values. Property owners don’t realize this

Needed support

- Ground rules to set expectations for upkeep; a deposit to cover anything not tended to or abandoned.
- Gardening basics workshops to help people keep their gardens manageable, not get overwhelmed, and be successful.
- Workshops with Gardening Matters for landlords so they understand how to manage the space well and can claim status as a “Certified Garden-Friendly Landlord.”
- Case studies of successful gardening situations and highlight how they manage their space.
- Property tax incentive for allowing gardens, like the storm-water property tax incentive or rebate on water used for gardening.
- Free or reduced cost soil testing, compost, mulch, rain barrels, other supplies



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- Funding opportunities for portable raised bed gardens that could be moved or put away in the winter.
- A group of volunteers who would till the soil when necessary; access to tools as most renters won't own them

Potential solutions

Different kinds of rental properties may require different solutions:

- For single-family, duplex, or triplex rentals with yards, a simple written agreement between the renters and property owners, perhaps as an addendum to the lease, may be enough to facilitate a positive gardening relationship. Generally, space in the yard will be set aside for the tenant(s) to garden. When a tenant leaves, there is a written understanding about how the garden will be transitioned. The property owner may use the garden as a selling point to new renters.
- For 4-8 unit properties, it MAY work well to still have some designated spots in a yard area and agreements with individual renters interested in using those spaces. The spaces might be made available on a first-come, first-served basis, with individual agreements as a part of the lease. When someone leaves, another renter would be eligible to use that space.
- For larger buildings, the space around the building and the number of potential interested renters make the coordinating logistics very similar to community garden. This would be a bigger task for property owners and renters. It may require some training for renters, similar to the "How to Start a Community Garden" training and Garden Sustainability training. It may also require some facilitated meetings between property owners and interested renters to educate both parties about community gardens and best practices. Both parties should come to agreement around the use of the land and water, the organization of the garden, and other items also addressed in the agreements for smaller units. The renter-gardeners should also come up with a gardener agreement form that is approved by the property owner.
- It is important to note that at least two renters preferred having space in a community garden because they had a greater sense of ownership of community garden space. If they were to move they would lose their apartment, but a community garden space would be theirs no matter where they lived.

This project is supported by the Minneapolis Health Department with Statewide Health Improvement Program funding, Minnesota Department of Health.



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