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## Port Towns await first community garden

Cottage City space will be available at no cost to residents

by Elahe Izadi | Staff Writer



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Cottage City will be a little greener this spring when the town breaks ground on the Port Towns' first community garden.

The Port Towns include Bladensburg, Colmar Manor, Cottage City and Edmonston. The garden at the end of Cottage Terrace toward the Anacostia River will be prepped for planting by May. Cottage City Commissioner Aileen McChesney (Ward 1) said the town may build a second plot if the first garden is a success. The first plot will have beds for about 20 households.

The community garden will have raised beds available for free to residents who sign up, and they can use the plots of land to plant produce. Residents will be responsible for maintaining their gardens and there may also be one communal plot, McChesney said.

There is another community garden nearby in Riverdale, the Master Peace Community Farm, where residents can harvest produce on plots of land. Gardeners also work with University of Maryland, College Park, students and use a rainwater system the captures rain water to water plants.

A few years ago, Cottage City resident Alseta Gholston, 37, suggested that the Town Commission consider building a community garden.

"It was something I had always wanted to do, gardening. I was looking for places that had community gardens and I noticed there were none nearby," she said.

McChesney said residents surveyed last year supported the garden.

The town revisited the project after Cottage City resident and former commissioner Anne Reeside, 94, donated \$200 in the fall in hopes of jumpstarting the project.

"I definitely wanted something so badly for these children for all these years," Reeside said. "I wanted the children to have a garden. That way the citizens could enjoy the children and the children could learn a lot from them."

McChesney said there are numerous health and environmental benefits in producing and eating locally grown food. The garden will also serve as a teaching tool for children.

"It's just the simple economics of returning to kitchen gardens to supplement the family table, and beyond that we recognize there's a generational gap of kids growing up who have never watched the process of seed to the plate," she said.

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The garden is supported by partnerships with the Anacostia Watershed Society, Port Towns Health Partnership and the Port Towns Youth Council.

Celeste James, program director for Kaiser Permanente's health initiative in the Port Towns, said the community garden will be an example of how to increase health-awareness in the Port Towns. The health initiative began as a way to combat the rise in obesity and preventable chronic disease, like diabetes.

"Gardening is known to be a stress reliever. Gardening is good exercise and has obvious teaching benefits for children," James said. "It kind of builds life-long learning."

James said that although there are a number of grocery stores in the Port Towns, organic and locally-grown foods aren't plentiful or easily-accessible.

"Getting people to consume fresh fruits and vegetables, as in many neighborhoods, is a concern and that's really about changing people's behavior," she said. "The community garden helps to change behavior by creating an understanding about food."

Gholston said she's pleased she will soon have a garden of her own.

"I'm very excited. I'm looking forward to getting a plot together and kind of see who else is interested, and getting to know my neighbors that way," she said.





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