

Needs Analysis and Assessment of Opportunities and Recommendations for Access to Community Gardening and Winter Programming in Dane County, WI

SPRING 2025 PHASE II REPORT: DATA AND RECOMMENDATIONS
UNIVERCITY ALLIANCE COUNTY BOARD OFFICE INTERN
PROJECT

SURYA SETHI • MAY 1, 2025



Photo courtesy of Rooted

Agenda Overview

- Executive Summary
- Project Objectives
- Methodology
- Key Themes
 - Geographic Barriers
 - Lack of Access to Garden Information and Communications
 - Financial Barriers
- Additional Considerations
- Conclusion



Photo courtesy of UW-Madison Office of Sustainability





Executive Summary

- Compiles existing data on this topic;
- Acknowledges gaps in community garden programming during the winter and discusses potential solutions;
- Provides examples of barriers to accessing community gardening programming and infrastructure; and
- Recommends initiatives to address themes identified by residents and further expand community gardening activities and programming.



Project Objectives

Phase I:

- Examine community needs regarding this issue
- Assess the existing infrastructure, programming for, and access to community gardens

Phase II:

- Survey Dane County residents on perceived access, programming gaps, and barriers
- Collect input on potential solutions



Photo courtesy of Rooted





Methodology

- Created a survey regarding perceived barriers to accessing community gardens, experiences with community gardens, and areas for improvement;
- Distributed the survey to food pantries, non-profit organizations, and community gardening centers across Dane County;
- The survey was also available through the Dane County Board website, Instagram, Facebook, and County Board members' emails; and
- The surveys were mainly used for their qualitative value over their quantitative value because the number of respondents was low.



Key Barriers

I. Geographic Barriers

II. Lack of Access to Garden Information & Communications

III. Financial Barriers





Geographic Barriers

“There [isn’t a community garden] close enough to me.”

- Respondents cited geography as a barrier to accessing community gardens.
- Many respondents don’t have gardens near their homes.
- Some respondents don’t have transportation to get to a garden farther away.



Recommendations to Address Geographic Barriers

- Dane County could open and operate a pilot community garden.
- The garden should be in an area that doesn't already have a community garden and has reduced access to fresh produce.
- Ex. Portland, Oregon; Sylvester, Georgia; and Natick, Massachusetts.
- Funding can be sourced from the federal Farm Bill or the New Garden Fund Grant from the Community Action Coalition.



Map of community garden locations in Dane County. The pins mark the location of community gardens in Dane County, with the red pins marking where survey respondents garden.





Lack of Access to Garden Information and Communications

“I do not know how to get involved
[or] where they are.”

- Many respondents don't know that community gardens are an option available to them.
- Other respondents don't know where to find information about community gardens.
- A lack of information and outreach to the general public can prevent people from taking advantage of a potentially helpful opportunity.



Recommendations to Improve Access to Garden Information & Communications

- Post guidelines about how to start and operate community gardens on the Dane County website, Instagram, Facebook, and email lists.
- Create a comprehensive list of all community gardens in Dane County.
- Encourage County Board members to form connections with community garden leaders and share relevant information with their constituents.
- Ex. Portland, Oregon.





Financial Barriers

- The cost of renting a plot can act as a barrier to entry.
- There are costs associated with transportation, gardening equipment, and time constraints.
- Many individuals can't justify the upfront price for an outcome that isn't guaranteed.



Recommendations to Overcome Financial Barriers

- Dane County could create a pilot grant program that covers the initial cost of renting a plot to individuals who have a proven financial need.
- The money allocated toward the grant program should range from \$150-\$200 in the first few years.
- The application for the grant program should be short enough that the application itself isn't a barrier.
- The county can choose to increase the money allocated toward the program at its discretion after the first few years.
- Ex. Natick, Massachusetts.





Additional Considerations

- In Phase I of the project, we aimed to examine gaps in programming during the winter months.
- In our survey, respondents indicated wanting more community gardening programming during the winter months.
- Many respondents answered that they would be interested in cooking or gardening classes, as well as a greenhouse, to remain engaged.
- Rooted hosts an annual community gardening summit during the winter to keep gardeners engaged.
- Ex. The Vermont Garden Network
 - Veducation Van



Conclusion

- There are a number of opportunities for community gardening in Dane County.
- There is room for improvement in terms of the outreach and engagement the county has with community gardens.
- Moving forward, further investigation can be done to examine the recommendations made here.



Questions?



5/1/2025