

## **Garden report -- 2015**

### **Organization**

The community council owns the land between Robbins Street and the first spur rail track from Raymond to Cromwell. In addition to the east end of the property used by Ettl and Franz, this piece of land includes two sections: the St. Anthony Park Community Garden and the St. Anthony Park Prairie Heritage Garden.

The district council is responsible for paying any costs associated with the property such as city assessments. Plots in the community garden are rented to gardeners to generate funds to pay these costs. The community gardens are a self-organizing project of the district council. A description of the governance of the gardens and a set of policies are the guiding documents. These are posted on the community council web site and the policies are provided to the gardeners at the beginning of the gardening year. The portion of the property that is used by Ettl and Franz is taxed as industrial property, and Ettl and Franz pay these taxes. The District council has an agreement with Ramsey County that the gardens will use at least one plot for benefit of a food shelf. In return Ramsey county taxes on the remainder of the property will be abated. This year two garden plots were used to provide 581 pounds of produce to the Keystone food shelf.

The gardens are managed by a volunteer steering committee made up of gardeners.

### **2015 Community Gardens**

94 plots were rented, with well over 200 people involved in the gardens. Gardeners from the previous year have the opportunity to rent the same plot again. 71 plots were rented to returning gardeners. There were more requests for plots from new applicants than could be filled. The 23 plots available to new gardeners were awarded by lottery.

Plots were rented for \$30. It is the garden steering committee's desire that the plot rentals pay the operating costs, with any donations made to the community gardens being available for improvement activities. We have usually been able to do this. Major elements of the expenses are city assessments and water. These two items amount to over half of the annual operating expenses. While we don't have final figures for the operating expenses for 2015 yet, they will be less than the income from the plot rentals. We maintain a reserve fund for unexpected expenditures and improvements, for example: tree trimming or tree removal, repair of the water system, replacement of lawn mowers or other major equipment, and anticipated major fence repair. This year the data entry and some of the mailing was done by volunteers. The remainder of the organizing tasks and communications are done by the garden steering committee.

Garden policies require reasonable maintenance of the plot during the gardening season and removal of any non-plant material (fence, trellis, etc.) from seasonal plots at the end of the gardening season. General upkeep of plots this year was assessed as good. Gardeners who did not comply with the posted policies were told they will be unable to rent a plot next year. They are allowed to re-apply after that.

### **Lots of Activity at the Garden (that was not gardening!)**

There was lots of extraneous activity at the gardens this past year, some by gardeners, but the most disruptive and overwhelming was by the City of St. Paul and the Railroad.

- 1) The Railroad removed a berm, a lot of trees and a section of track that had been used to park train cars on. This action essentially removed a semblance of screening for the neighborhood. The new visual is striking since, as one walks along Robbins, one has the impression that the trucking company parking lot across the tracks is right up close.
- 2) The gardeners began working behind the gardens on the east end, clearing out large trees which hang over the gardens and shade things too much. We removed five trees and more removal is planned, with replacement plantings that will be suitable for screening without shading the garden plots. Gardeners also removed the old shed which had rotted and had a new, very nice shed built to hold the mower, all the hoses and some other materials as well as tools over winter.
- 3) The City of St. Paul was doing major work on water lines on Robbins and Raymond. In the course of it they found they needed to replace a valve in our garden water connection. After the end of the garden season, they dug up an entire plot and sort of turned the soil upside down leaving all the subsoil on top and the topsoil underneath.
- 4) The City of St. Paul completed the deep storm sewer tunnel work that had been going on at the west end of the garden for the last five years or so. They cleaned up and left things in immaculate condition on that end. They replaced all the shrubs that they had damaged over the years. We were very happy!

- 5) No sooner had the City departed than the Railroad came to the Council and worked out an agreement for some storm sewer work they needed to do. They have now dug up an entire garden plot. There are huge piles of dirt and other stuff all over the area which the City had just cleaned up. They have promised to restore things to the previous condition when they are done. They have promised to replant what they damage. We were very sad.
- 6) The Council has arranged for an Air Monitoring Station to be installed on the west end of the blacktop, just east of the prairie. This has been done.

(Comment: The City has been wonderful to work with over the course of the past years with regard to the sewer work in such proximity to us. They have been quickly responsive to our concerns and they have taken initiative to inform us of actions. They have followed through on everything agreed. This year, our experience with the city water workers was the same.....they made extra efforts not to interrupt the garden season...they took initiative to contact us...they showed us exactly what they were doing and warned us as to the worst possible scenario, which, fortunately, did not happen.)

### **2015 Prairie Heritage Garden**

We continue to see additional diversity and movement in the prairie garden.

The big excitement of this year has been the cup plants which have begun to thrive! There is also the start of a colony of Joe Pye Weed. The colonies of showy goldenrod continue. The monarda has been calming down and moving around. There is a second area of roses now. So there are many good things happening.

Removal of invasives continued. We are struggling against the crown vetch. It is becoming a serious problem.

### **History**

The community gardens were started in 1981 and grew out of a neighborhood leaf composting project of the district council.

The district council has always been the “responsible” organization for the community gardens, initially renting the land from the railroad.

When the railroad said they were going to sell the land for the purpose of constructing a steel coil off-loading facility, the gardeners and district council responded by organizing a political effort to prevent the loss of the gardens and the construction of a disruptive use incompatible with the residential neighbors. The gardens provide an attractive and “green” buffer between the residences and the transportation corridors of railroad tracks, Energy Park Drive and Highway 280.

The district council and gardeners raised over \$250,000 to purchase the land, including over \$25,000 in individual contributions from neighborhood residents and businesses. This happened in 1999 /2000.

An important part of the effort was an agreement with Ettel and Franz to allow them to continue parking on a portion of the property if they would support the neighborhood’s attempt to acquire it. They provided a large contribution that matched a STAR fund grant and got the fundraising started with some real chance of success. They have continued to be a good neighbor to the garden and have helped the gardeners with specific projects. Ettel and Franz added a storage building on the east end of the property in 2012 which they use. They were able to do this in a way that did not impact the gardens. The building is nice and neat and their storage is all now neater.