THE ROLE OF HORTICULTURE IN THE URBANIZED ENVIRONMENT

Reston has over 200,000 people - more than 20 cities states

A Proposal For The Development Of The Reston Town Green

Prepared for the Reston Association
by Donald Humphrey

Funding Process
- 1988 Gaith bond issue (past)
- Planning for Nov 98 bond issue.
- Park Authority develops
- 1 yr process beginning

- 5 acre (recently received)
- Chairman of Park Authority
- Location between Spectrum and Cameron Glen
- Spring Green Garden Park wanted by
  - local (eastern part of County) - 1/3 of money
  - Montgomery Farmers Markets - FF Co Parks
  - n. garden plots in FF Co. Parks

Funding Process
- 1988 Gaith bond issue (past)
- Planning for Nov 98 bond issue.
- Park Authority develops
- 1 yr process beginning

- 5 acre (recently received)
- Chairman of Park Authority
- Location between Spectrum and Cameron Glen
- Spring Green Garden Park wanted by
  - local (eastern part of County) - 1/3 of money
  - Montgomery Farmers Markets - FF Co Parks
  - n. garden plots in FF Co. Parks
The popular conception of the urbanized environment, where 95% of the population lives, is one of excessive traffic, air and water pollution and the lack of open space, natural diversity and beauty.

Indeed, construction activities have destroyed woodlands and plant and animal habitat. Top soils have been stripped away and generally replaced by sterile sub soils.

Rain water runoff from roofs, streets and parking lots causes flash flooding of streams, and the overuse of pesticides and fertilizers on millions of lawns along with industrial pollutants seriously reduce and endanger the variety of life forms and populations in urban waters.

Environmental and conservation organizations, apart from concern over air and water pollution, tend to ignore urban environments, concentrating on other national and international issues. Local jurisdictions have taken progressive steps toward recycling and to the provision of public park and recreation lands but most attempts to improve environmental quality or to avoid further degradation have been via regulations with mixed results.

These are rather sober and dispiriting facts, but in spite of them, very great potential exists for the improvement of the built environment, for the quality of life and the sense of community in the urbanized areas where most of us live. These areas may become, in fact, given their limitations, centers of plant and animal diversity and beauty. Improvements can be realized, not by heavy public sector outlays, but by energizing the activities of tens of millions of private individuals in the care, maintenance and improvement of their own environment, assisted by a network of education and information. Furthermore, these activities have very positive effects on the economy.

The growth of the green industry in recent years attests to the desires of individuals to improve the quality of their home environment. A main impediment, however, is individual lack of knowledge and of workable models that can be replicated in the home landscape.

Horticulturists are increasingly aware of their role, along with conservationists, environmentalists, the green industry and the concerned public, of developing sustainable landscapes that: beautify the environment; increase the diversity of plant and animal species; reduce reliance on inorganic fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides; conserve water; reduce runoff; promote recycling of organic waste and generally enrich the environment and people's lives.

Individuals need information on landscape design, soil development and restoration, ecological, environmental and climatic factors that affect the range of plants that may be grown in a given area, where desired plants may be obtained and how to grow and maintain them successfully. They need information on how to increase populations of desirable wildlife in their gardens and how to effectively recycle organic wastes through composting and mulching. Such activities, engaged in by millions of people across the country, have tremendous economic impact, a fact widely understood in England and other European countries, where gardening is big business.

The role of the public sector should be primarily one of education and example. Fairfax County is an established leader in this area through the development of Green Spring Gardens Park and its county-
wide horticulture program. Garden writer Alan Lacey, following a lecture at Green Spring, wrote in his newsletter, Homeground, that: "...the most wonderful thing about this park is its determination to serve local citizens, enabling them to garden as well as possible under the conditions that are theirs. It would be almost unimaginably beneficial to horticulture in America if there were hundreds, even thousands, of such local parks, designed to show the opportunities and possibilities for gardening in their immediate vicinity. All gardening is, after all, local."

Now that the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) is about to acquire the five acres comprising the Reston Town Green, there is a need to determine how it may be best utilized to serve the people of western Fairfax county and adjacent areas. The simple development of urban green space with expensive hardscape and mass plantings common in such areas, will do little to increase people's knowledge of ways to improve the home environment. FCPA's own survey of preferred recreational activities of county residents found gardening to be one of the top three recreational pursuits. What would be most beneficial, useful and cost effective in terms of the overall economy would be a community educational facility with demonstration gardens tied intimately to it where people of all ages and incomes may learn how to improve their home environment regardless of whether they live in apartments, town houses or detached single family homes.

The opportunities are great and could include devoting part of the facility to demonstrating the wide range of house plants that may be grown under varying indoor conditions and their proper care; to their development of townhouse gardens for what is becoming a principle form of home construction; gardens for single family homes that can encourage plant and animal diversity and native species; and to the improvement of public and commercial spaces.

Experience indicates that facilities of this kind will attract a loyal corps of volunteers whose activities will help defray operating expenses. A Friend's group can help raise funds and the active participation of the business and commercial sector in a wide variety of ways may further provide for the development and operation of the facility.

Segments of the education program can be expected to pay their way through admission charges, allowing the public to hear experts on a wide variety of horticultural, landscape and conservation subjects. Various other FCPA program activities, can also be expected to generate revenue.

With gardening widely recognized as one of the main recreational activities in the nation, there should be little doubt about the viability of such a facility.

FCPA, like most public agencies, does not make major planning and development decisions without public participation. Development of the Reston Town Green for any park purpose would require capital funds that are characteristically raised through bond referenda. Inasmuch as work on a new bond referendum is currently underway, it would be necessary for FCPA to provide an estimate of costs for inclusion in a bond referendum package if development of the Town Green is to take place in the near future. FCPA's experience in developing Green Springs Gardens Park could provide a reasonable estimate for a public hearing and inclusion in the referendum. Subsequent planning could provide more detailed costs.