

NAHP Update

Turning Urban Food Deserts into Healthy Oases

BY JENNIFER JONES

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There are a multitude of studies available that show there is a link between stable affordable housing and a person's well-being.

"When housing is unaffordable or located in high-stress environments, residents tend to experience more debilitating health concerns. But people who have access to stable, affordable, high-quality housing tend to be in better health, which leads to lower health-care expenditures," according to the National Conference's Center for Housing Policy.

But having an affordable place to live is only one component to healthy living. Things such as exercise, fresh food and a safe, nurturing environment can also play a part. However, urban multifamily affordable housing typically is located in what is called "food deserts" without access to fresh, healthy food choices.

Parts of Chicago can be described a food deserts; however, at Legends South and Westhaven Park, residents are eating fresh vegetables grown in their very own community gardens. Legends South, in



COURTESY WESTHAVEN PARK

cooperation with the Chicago Botanical Gardens (CBG), also serves as home for an urban farm, where up to seven commercial farmers use the land to grow their products to sell to restaurants and such, but also offer their wares to the resi-

dents at a reduced price. Besides the farm, Legends South has 16 beds that are assigned to residents to grow their own produce. The community garden already existed when the urban farm was created in 2014.



NATIONAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (NAHMA)—Protecting the Interests of Affordable Housing Property Managers and Owners

Community Garden Checklist

ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY

Begin by bringing people and different organizations together to learn which issues are important to your community. Discuss how a community garden—whether a communal space or individual plots—could serve the needs of the community. If a community garden will benefit the community, build on this momentum by holding regular meetings to collaborate on ideas and goals. Develop a plan of action. Get people energized and organized.

IDENTIFY RESOURCES

Forming local partnerships is an excellent way to leverage resources and gain access to needed materials, tools, funding, volunteers and technical assistance. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s People's Garden website has how-to videos and databases filled with garden-based learning curricula, free seed and funding sources, and healthy gardening practices. You can call on an Extension Master Gardener volunteer in your area to help with gardening challenges. The long-term success of your community garden will depend a great deal on relationships with partners. And be sure to check out the Community Garden Resource Guide.

CHOOSE A SITE

Across the country, community gardens are becoming an anchor for neighborhood revitalization. Community gardens range in purpose from increasing access to fresh, healthy food in rural towns to providing safe green spaces where youth can play in urban cities. What type of community garden will your neighborhood be planting? Knowing this information will narrow your search for a site. If growing food, find a location that receives at least six hours of direct sunlight per day with easy access to water. Check if the land you would be growing on has proper drainage. Once you identify an ideal site, find out who owns the land. Contact the landowner and discuss next steps which may include obtaining permission through written agreement or lease and getting liability insurance.

GARDEN HEALTHY

Before you start planting, it is important to research the history and past uses of your chosen site. Once the past uses have been determined, take samples of the soil and have them analyzed to find out soil type and quality. Environmental Protection Agency has step-by-step guidelines on how to do this. Consult with your state environmental agency, local health department or county's Cooperative Extension office to learn how to take a soil sample and to determine what kinds of samples you should take. The quality of the soil can have an effect on the design of your garden.

DESIGN YOUR GARDEN

Every community garden is different based on its specific size, location and mission. Design your garden to fit the needs of the community it serves. Consider factors such as age-appropriate design, accessibility, protection from animals or vandalism, storage of tools and space to gather. Incorporate sustainable gardening techniques such as: using native plants, composting, mulching, applying an integrated pest management approach, creating a habitat for wildlife, using water wisely or installing a rain barrel. Use the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map to determine which plants will thrive in your part of the country.

GET GROWING

Start gardening and implementing your community garden program. Once the project is up and running, let everyone know. Gain greater community support by welcoming visitors and sharing updates on how the neighborhood is benefiting from the garden's existence. Over time, revisit the plan and make any needed changes based on lessons learned or feedback from partners and neighbors. Remember to plan ahead so that the garden will continue to grow for seasons to come.

"The urban farm and community garden work well for us," Vorrícia Harvey, director of compliance and community development for Interstate Realty Management Company, said of Legends South. "The key is to have a willing entity to help."

Through the partnership, the CBG provides an intern who visits Legends South regularly to provide advice to the novice gardeners, oversee the commercial farmers and keep the community garden going at times when volunteers wane.

It was not all smooth sailing, however, when CGB sought to create the urban farm. Harvey said the community wanted to know how allowing commercial farmers on the property would translate into a benefit for the residents. She worked with the botanical gardens to ensure the residents could purchase the produce at a reduced rate and some of the vendors even donate food for the senior residents. Even still, there were some hiccups.

"One of the challenges with the farm was that many residents didn't understand that it was a business and that they couldn't just go pick what they wanted," Harvey said. "They were used to the community garden, so we had to educate them."



For more resources on community gardening or urban agriculture visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture website, <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome>.

Information provided courtesy of USDA's People's Garden Initiative. For more gardening resources visit www.usda.gov/peoplesgarden.



COURTESY WESTHAVEN PARK

At Westhaven Park, a small community garden was introduced in 2009. At first, it started with just a few annuals. Over time it grew to 16 raised beds that has attracted as many as 20 novice gardeners. The volunteers are responsible for creating the guidelines that govern the community garden and a consultant brought in by the management company helps maintain the beds and provides advice.

“Every year, we’ve added some beds,” Lisa Young, resident services coordinator at Westhaven Gardens, said. “In most cases the gardeners get to take what they produce. They all share the work and they all share the produce.”

The community holds a holiday pot luck where all the residents get to sample the goods grown in their backyard so to speak. Young said some of the favorites include collards, kale and peppers, but all

types of vegetables and fruit have been produced in the garden. The volunteers, working with the consultant, decide what produce will be planted and when, as well as the division of work.

“When we started the seeds came from Green Core. You didn’t even know what you were getting until you went to pick them up,” Young said.

Besides providing fresh food, the garden has become a social hub for the community. Young said the volunteer gardeners go to schools to help student plant their own seeds that are eventually transferred to the community garden. It has also brought residents of all ages and backgrounds together.

“The individual gardeners have gotten to know each other whereas they may never have had been friends,” Young said.

Both properties are located on land owned by the Chicago

Housing Authority and needed to go through an approval process before breaking ground. Each also entered partnerships to help cover the costs associated with creating the gardens such as soil, seeds, construction of beds and security. Young said before undertaking a community garden make sure you have a plan, research what permissions and permits might be required and find a partner to assist in the creation and maintenance of the garden.

“Start small and build,” Young said. “Now the loveliest piece of the community is the garden and the comradery it creates.”

NAHMA’s Advocacy Goals Task Force is also studying the subject of urban farming and the ways the association can become a resource for its members in this area. **NU**

Jennifer Jones is manager of communications and public relations for NAHMA.

Welcome New Certificants!

NAHP Executive

- » Sandra Cipollone
Interstate Realty
Management Co.
Marlton, N.J.
- » Maribel Concepcion
Trinity Management LLC
Boston, Mass.

NAHMS

- » Thomas Clark
First Realty Management
Corp.
Boston, Mass.
- » James Tucker
PK Management LLC
Chattanooga, Tenn.

NAHMT

- » Francisco Medeiros
First Realty Management
Corp.
Boston, Mass.
- » Wendell Watters
Crossgates Management Inc.
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Earn one of NAHMA’s prestigious professional credentials, which are dedicated solely to recognizing and promoting achievement of the highest possible professional standards in affordable housing management. Programs include:

- National Affordable Housing Professional (NAHP™)
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- Certified Professional of Occupancy™ (CPO™)
- Advanced Issues in HUD Occupancy™ (ACPO™)
- Fair Housing Compliance™ (FHC™)
- National Affordable Housing Maintenance Technician (NAHMT™)
- National Affordable Housing Maintenance Supervisor (NAHMS™)
- Credential for Green Property Management

For more information, go to www.nahma.org and click on Education.

Residents' Activities Foster Community

There are several definitions for community in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, but the overriding trait is a group of individuals coming together as a unified unit, typically for social, economic, religious or political interests, or shared pursuits. A sense of community reassures people that they belong to something more than a shared living environment, but bringing people together, especially in a hurried world, can make uniting neighbors a challenge.

At Park 7 Apartments in Washington, D.C., the residents mostly organize events and get-togethers themselves using a resident portal.

"It's like a Facebook for the residents," Rediet Abebe, regional marketing coordinator for Edgewood Management, said. "You earn points every time you post or 'like' something. While there isn't a reward for points, most of our residents have over 10,000 points."

Besides using the portal to keep residents informed of issues at the urban multifamily development, it has become a place for residents to organize things such as a book club or coffee chats. The activities are in addition to the quarterly events the management company provides on weekends and in the evenings. Abebe said they see the residents' activities as supplementing what management can do and are encouraging them to become more active, such as holding viewing parties during football season in the

community room.

"With multifamily properties, it's hard to get that connection because residents work," Abebe said. "But we see them holding events on their own. We're not there all the time, so we want them to take ownership."

Park 7 opened in 2014 and 92 percent of its 376 units are occupied. The residential complex is a mix-used development with retail occupying the first floor. It also has two courtyards with grills and play areas. It was named a 2015 Vanguard Award winner by NAHMA in June.

"It's a beautiful community," Abebe said. "You always see residents just hanging out."

Hunters View in San Francisco was already an estab-

lished community before it began a multiphase renovation. The revitalization plan called for the demolition of the existing housing units and the eventual creation of up to 800 mixed-income housing units. The entire development consists of three separate buildings with townhouses and flats, courtyard and community center, and it is occupied with a mix of residents including multifamily, seniors and special needs. In 2014, the development received a Vanguard Award from NAHMA.

Hunters View partners with



other organizations in order to bring the multigenerational, multiethnic residents together. The Bayview YMCA serves as the community's social services component, said property manager Denise Fore.

Working with the Y, Hunters View provides a job resource program, senior programming and meals, peer leadership, recycling, gardening, parties and other festivities that attract sponsors such as Comcast.

"San Francisco is pretty services rich, so there are a lot of organizations to partner with," Fore said.

The Y even has staff members who serve as translators and has organized activities that celebrate the different cultures that embody the community.

"Some of the incoming residents went through culture shock, but they have adjusted," Fore said. In addition, some Hunters View staff members are also residents, including Fore. She said that helps tear down the barriers between the management company and residents.

"Fostering a sense of community is very important, especially in a community such as this that has had so much history," Fore said. "They need the support of each other. They're working for the betterment of their community and helping each other. A sense of community makes you feel not so isolated." **NU**

Recognizing Exceptional Communities

Each year, NAHMA celebrates multifamily developments that prove affordable housing can be an asset to any community through its Communities of Quality (COQ) National Recognition Program, and COQ and Vanguard awards.

To be eligible for the COQ Awards, a community must be a COQ Nationally Recognized property. For more information on the Communities of Quality National Recognition program, visit <http://www.nahma.org/awards-contests/communities-of-quality/>.

The COQ Awards honor the achievements of affordable housing providers who have made an unprecedented contribution to the affordable housing industry by developing and maintaining outstanding properties that are safe and vibrant places to live.

If you are already a Nationally Recognized property, you have done the hard part. Now is the time to work on your application for the 2015 COQ Awards competition, which is due Nov. 6. The application brochure can be downloaded from the COQ Web page at www.nahma.org.

The Vanguard Awards were created to honor communities that were too new to meet the qualifications for the COQ National Recognition and Awards program. Mark your calendars, the Vanguard Awards application will be available in early 2016.



Seizing Opportunities As They Come

NAME: Katrina Heard, NAHP, CPO, SHCM

MANAGEMENT COMPANY: Arlington Properties Inc.

POSITION: Senior Community Manager

Katrina Heard began her career as a leasing agent in 1994 with Arlington Properties Inc. Twenty-one years later, Heard is still with the Alabama-based company. Only today, she is a senior community manager, serving as an on-site manager at Southampton Apartments in Birmingham and as a mentor for other property managers.

“The company I work for is a great company. You know the saying, ‘Do what you love, love what you do.’ That’s me,” she

said. “I love helping people.”

At one time, Heard was on the receiving end of that help. Her experience as a single mother shapes her career choices today.

“Years ago, I used to live in affordable housing and I thought it was a great opportunity to help people,” she said. “A lot of people in this industry have been in the program. It’s a great program for those who need it. I was down on my luck and needed help ... and I was thankful.”

So when an opportunity opened up with Arlington, Heard said she took it and “has rolled with it” ever since. “I was put here to help people,” she said.

And she keeps rolling, taking advantage of opportunities as they come along. Last year,

Heard earned her Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration and is considering going back to school for her master’s degree. Eventually, Heard said she may move into human resources or compliance, but for now, she is happy doing what she loves.

Going back to school while working full time presented challenges, but the effort was worth the sacrifice. Even though at times, she said she didn’t have a life beyond work and school.

“I had been out of school for a while. I knew most jobs want you to have a bachelor’s degree,” she said of her decision. “You never know what will happen and I had an opportunity, so I went back.”

She credits her family with keeping her grounded and likes to spend time with her hus-

band, son, four stepchildren and two grandchildren when not working. She also enjoys reading and fishing.

She tells the young managers she mentors to have patience, to be consistent, to stay grounded and not to take everything so personally.

“Sometimes people will say things and they are just letting off steam. They just need someone to listen,” Heard said. “If you want to be in this industry you have to be people oriented and you have to have people skills. You will be dealing with people with different personalities.”

She also recommends taking advantage of the opportunities that present themselves. “This career can be tough. But it is an opportunity to learn what can I do better today,” she said. **NU**

PROTECTING THE INTERESTS OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROPERTY MANAGERS AND OWNERS

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400 North Columbus Street, Suite 203
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NAHPupdate
Fall 2015

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