

The Neighborhood Grow Center

2016 PILOT PROJECT

FINAL REPORT



The Neighborhood Grow Center is a project of



**Baltimore Office
of Sustainability**
People • Planet • Prosperity



Program funding generously provided by



Details
DECONSTRUCTION
A HUMANIM SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

With the support of our partners



**the
Neighborhood
DesignCenter**



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION
Saving a National Treasure

Civic Works



The Neighborhood Grow Center is a program of the Baltimore Office of Sustainability's Waste-To-Wealth Initiative. Learn more at www.baltimoresustainability.org/projects/waste-to-wealth/

Report prepared by:

Andy Cook
Sustainable Economic Development Coordinator
Baltimore City Department of Planning
July 2016

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
Background	6
Partners	7
Programming	9
Metrics	11
Lessons Learned	14
Planning for the Future	16
Appendices	





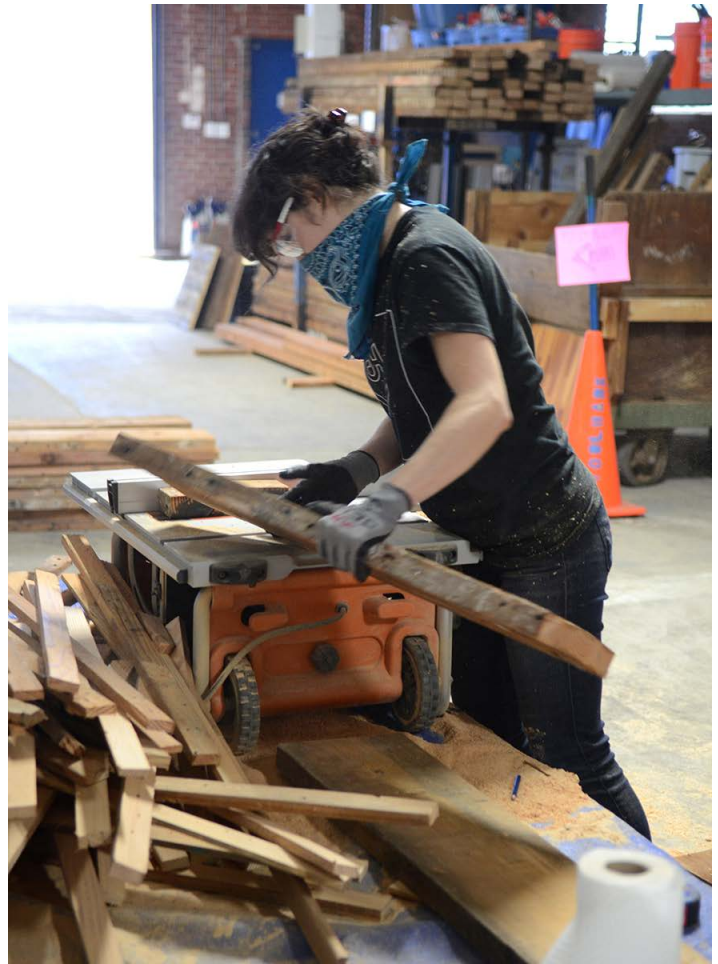
Executive Summary

In April 2016, The Baltimore Office of Sustainability, in partnership with the Department of Public Works and numerous community partners, hosted The Neighborhood Grow Center at the Baltimore Community ToolBank.

The Neighborhood Grow Center (NGC) was a series of greening programs aimed at increasing the capacity of Baltimore City residents to implement vacant lot greening and stormwater management projects. The goal of the program was to create a 'greening resource hub' where city residents could acquire the skills, knowledge, and materials to take on these projects, while also strengthening community networks of greeners across the city.





The programs took place every weekend in April, and attracted over 200 visitors from 61 city neighborhoods. The NGC hosted three plant giveaways, two networking events, and 20 workshops, which drew 140 participants combined.

The goal of the Neighborhood Grow Center Pilot Project was to test the model for practicality and usefulness to city residents, and to inform plans to establish Neighborhood Grow Centers in several permanent locations throughout Baltimore City.



A workshop instructor prepares reclaimed lumber for the creation of outdoor furniture.

The NGC consisted of five primary activities:

-  A product design/build competition based on reclaimed building materials.
-  A series of workshops focused on greening skills.
-  Plant give-aways hosted by partner organizations.
-  Green product retail focusing on reclaimed building materials and soil products created from food waste.
-  Networking opportunities for community leaders and green professionals.

Key Successes:

22 workshops were held in subjects ranging from stormwater credits to chicken coops

Baltimore Community ToolBank added a **permanent retail space** for Chesapeake Compost Works soil products

Over 200 people visited to attend workshops, purchase products, or receive free plants

At least 10 community managed open spaces received products built at the NGC, including **rain barrels, raised beds, and outdoor furniture**



City residents come out for the Community Greening Resource Network's (CGRN) plant give-away day.



Participants share their designs from the 'Design A Lot (And Fund It Too!)' workshop.

Background

The concept of the Neighborhood Grow Center dates back to 2014, when BOS and DPW staff recognized potential synergies between three different programs.

In 2014, BOS was launching the Waste-To-Wealth Initiative, a program aimed at growing Baltimore's 're-use economy' by supporting businesses and city operations that could create value from waste products. Specifically, Waste-To-Wealth is meant to target three waste streams: wood waste, food waste, and construction & demolition debris. A 2014 study of Baltimore's solid waste stream discovered that while these materials can be re-used to make high-value products, most of what Baltimore City generates in these categories is being chipped, landfilled, or incinerated. A small number of private businesses have recently begun addressing this by turning food waste into compost and by salvaging re-usable building materials. For wood waste, BOS in partnership with the Department of Recreation and Parks has recently launched a program to sort and sell valuable wood generated through city maintenance of the urban tree canopy. BOS staff made it a goal of the Waste-To-Wealth Initiative to create distribution outlets for these materials in order to increase accessibility and demand among city residents.

Meanwhile, BOS staff working on the Growing Green Initiative were seeking ways to facilitate the greening and re-use of Baltimore's thousands of vacant lots. They had created the Green Pattern Book, which outlines best practices for vacant lot greening, but recognized that many city residents lacked the training and access to materials to implement strategies outlined in the book.

At the same time, DPW staff were developing strategies to help the City meet its goal of reducing the amount of pollutants entering the Chesapeake Bay through stormwater run-off. Since most of the land in the city is privately owned, DPW recognized that strategies must be developed to help city residents implement stormwater management on their own private properties. However, most city residents lack the knowledge and training to do this on their own.

Recognizing that many of the materials being targeted by the Waste-To-Wealth Initiative (including compost, mulch, and lumber) were necessary components of many stormwater management and vacant lot greening best practices, BOS and DPW teamed up to create a proposal that would help them both reach their goals. The result was a proposed network of locations throughout Baltimore where residents could access the materials and training needed to

create community farms, rain gardens, and other types of stormwater management projects that could use recycled materials and be implemented on vacant city lots. This goal was included as a recommendation in the Waste-To-Wealth Report, and assigned to BOS staff for implementation.

BOS staff decided to run a temporary pilot version of the Neighborhood Grow Center in the Spring of 2016, in order to test out the concept before committing resources to the establishment of a permanent site.



A section of Details reclaimed material retail display.

Partners

Baltimore City is fortunate to have many businesses and non-profits that work on issues related to greening, water quality, waste diversion, and community development. Rather than replicate the work of these organizations, BOS staff envisioned the Neighborhood Grow Center as a place where many different groups could aggregate their services. In the Fall of 2015, BOS convened a group of stakeholders from such organizations to brainstorm how the Neighborhood Grow Center could support their work. The key take-away from that meeting was that the Center should primarily serve as a place for education, where partner groups could lead workshops in various skills, and have the convenience of having materials and tools on-hand for participants to use. To that end, BOS engaged the following partners:

Baltimore Community ToolBank

Baltimore Community ToolBank served as the venue for the Neighborhood Grow Center. Their vast inventory of tools, helpful and knowledgeable staff, and experience with greening projects made the ToolBank an obvious fit. Their location in the Carroll-Camden Industrial Area also made the site accessible to residents of south Baltimore, an area historically underserved by city-wide programming. The ToolBank generously donated workshop space, retail display space, tool rental, and staff time to keep the building open on the weekends.

Details Deconstruction and Brick & Board

Both Details Deconstruction and Brick & Board are social enterprise projects of Humanim, Inc. Details deconstructs buildings and wholesales the salvaged material for re-use; Brick & Board is the retail outlet that processes the materials and sells directly to consumers. The two organizations sponsored the Deconstructed Design Competition by contributing prize money and helping to judge the entries. Details also provided free salvaged wood and brick to the workshops and Brick & Board retailed additional materials at the NGC.

Community Greening Resource Network (CGRN)

CGRN is a project of Parks and People Foundation that aims to provide greening resources and knowledge to network members. CGRN assisted with NGC promotion, provided workshop instruction and hosted two plant give-away events at the NGC.

Baltimore City Department of Public Works (DPW)

DPW provided logistical support to the NGC planning and evaluation process, and led two informational sessions about Baltimore City's stormwater credit system.

Chesapeake Compost Works

Chesapeake Compost Works retailed their line of soil products at the NGC.

The following additional businesses and non-profit partners led workshops and/or plant giveaways at the NGC:

Neighborhood Design Center
Blue Water Baltimore
Tree Baltimore
Station North Tool Library
Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Institute for Local Self Reliance
Sunnyside Farms
Hillen Homestead
Modernature
B Willow
Knits, Soy, & Metal
Industrial Arts Collective
Baltimore Orchard Project/Civic Works
Baltimore City Department of Housing and Community Development

Funders

Neither BOS nor DPW had funds available for NGC implementation, so BOS staff raised \$10,000 through grants from the Chesapeake Bay Trust and the Abell Foundation. Humanim, Inc. was the project's fiscal sponsor. This generous foundation support enabled BOS to pay for workshop instruction and materials.



Above: Participants and materials at the Terrarium making workshop. Below: Participants in the 'Pointillist Chair' workshop.



Winning designs from the Deconstructed Design Competition were prototyped at NGC workshops. Samantha Polinik's winning '2By Folding Chair' design (pictured at left), and the prototype workshop (pictured at right).

Programming

The Neighborhood Grow Center consisted of five primary programs: The Deconstructed Design Competition, a series of free greening workshops, five plant give-away events, green product retail, and one networking event for NGC workshop instructors and partners.

The Deconstructed Design Competition

The Deconstructed Design Competition was conceived in partnership with Details Deconstruction and Brick & Board, two social enterprise projects of Humanim, Inc. that deconstruct buildings and re-sell the materials. The competition solicited original designs for products made from reclaimed building materials, and offered a \$500 prize to winning designs (see Appendix A). Four designs were chosen, including designs for a folding chair, an outdoor stationary chair, a coffee table, and an outdoor book shelter. Each design

was prototyped in a workshop setting at the NGC, and most of the final products were donated to community organizations throughout the city.

The Workshops

In addition to the design competition workshops, the NGC also hosted 18 other workshops focused on different greening skills or areas of knowledge (see Appendix C for a complete list of workshops). These workshops were free and open to all city residents. Workshop registration was promoted via the BOS website and social media feeds, as well as through partner organization email lists and social media feeds, paper flyers at community events, and a press release sent to all local media outlets (see Appendix B for promotional flyer samples). Registration was managed through the online service Eventbrite, and participants could also sign up by calling BOS directly.



A design competition winner constructs a coffee table from reclaimed roof decking and flooring.

The workshops generally fell into one of two categories: Informational or Making/Building. The informational workshops were lecture-based, and covered topics including how to access city-owned land, permaculture techniques, and Baltimore City's stormwater credit system. The Making/Building workshops were more hands-on, and usually required the use of power tools. These workshops included all of the Deconstructed Design Competition prototype sessions, as well as workshops in how to build chicken coops, how to make candles and terrariums with recycled materials, and how to make rain barrels.

+ Plant Give-Aways

Several NGC partner groups hold occasional plant give-away days as part of their regular spring programming. These events are popular, and provide residents with seedlings, shrubs, and young trees for home or community gardens. The NGC hosted five give-aways over the course of it's month, in partnership with The Community Greening Resource Network, Tree Baltimore, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, and Hillen Homestead.

These give-aways attracted over 60 visitors, and distributed over 850 plants in total.

+ Green Product Retail

The NGC also included a green-product retail display consisting of reclaimed building materials and composted soil products, provided by Brick & Board and Chesapeake Compost Works.

During ten days of retail, Chesapeake Compost Works sold \$243 of soil products and Brick & Board sold \$400 of building materials.

Chesapeake Compost Works and Baltimore Community ToolBank have agreed to continue selling CCW soil products at the ToolBank as part of their regular operations.

+ Networking for Green Professionals

At the end of the program, BOS hosted a networking event for workshop instructors and other partners, many of whom had not met over the course of the NGC program. Opportunities for professional collaborations were discussed, and plans were formed to create ongoing 'green professionals' networking events in the future.

Neighborhood Grow Center By The Numbers

10 Days Open

22 Workshops Held

61 Neighborhoods Represented

208 Visitors

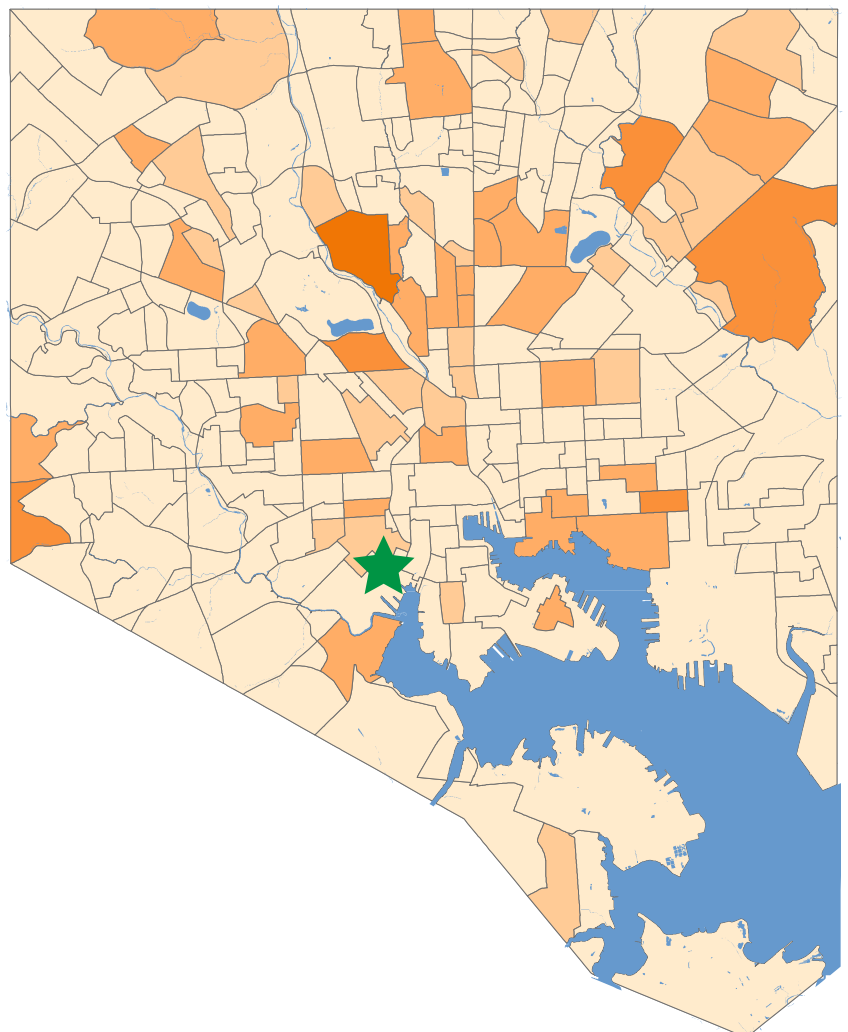
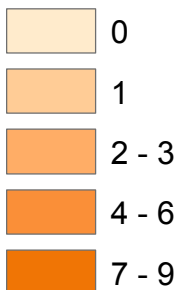
852 Plants Given Away

42% Minority Participation

\$643 Product Sales

Neighborhood Grow Center Attendee Distribution by Neighborhood

Number of attendees



WHAT

8

Micro-Green Kits



6

Folding Chairs



1

Book Shelter



WE

8

Terrariums



4

"Pointillist" Chairs





18 Rain Barrels



8 Raised Beds



10 Worm Bins



6 Chicken Coops



1 Coffee Table

MADE



Participants in the Permaculture 101 workshop.

Lessons Learned

Consider a minimal workshop sign-up fee

BOS staff chose to make all NGC workshops free in order to be accessible to people of all incomes, but this may have facilitated low turn-out due to people's tendency to view free things as optional. 219 people registered for workshops through Eventbrite, but only 152 showed up (69% of registrants). This was unfortunate because most workshops booked up completely online and had waiting lists of people who could have otherwise attended. This problem could be solved by either a) over-booking workshops with the expectation of 65-75% turn-out, or b) charging a minimum registration fee (\$5-10) that would encourage people to take registration more seriously. For people who wish to attend but either can't afford such a fee or lack online payment capabilities, a hardship exemption may be made available.

Coordinate closely with other greening programs

April is a very busy month for greening activities in Baltimore! Despite our attempts to coordinate with as many greening partner organizations as possible during the NGC planning process, some greening organizations in the city expressed concern that NGC programs overlapped with their own. While this may be unavoidable, care should be taken in future planning processes to create and distribute an event calendar to all greening organizations at least two months ahead of time. This issue may be reduced if the NGC becomes an annual or permanent event that other organizations can plan around.

Consider weather/coldness of space

Locating the NGC at the Baltimore Community ToolBank was successful in nearly every way except one: April 2016 was chilly and rainy. The Baltimore Community ToolBank is in a drafty,

un-heated warehouse space. Many workshop participants complained of the chilly atmosphere. Future NGC iterations would do well to consider using space heaters for the workshop area or warning visitors ahead of time to dress appropriately.

Staff Appropriately

Although partner organizations assisted in promotion and workshop instruction, the bulk of the planning, fundraising, execution, and reporting of the NGC program was taken on by one BOS staff person. While possible, such light staffing is not recommended for future iterations of the NGC. At a minimum, an additional staff person should be present during all NGC activities to handle participant check-in and product sales, while another staff person coordinates with workshop instructors and host-site staff. Additionally, funding should be made available in the budget for contracting the design and creation of promotional materials, and for program evaluation and reporting.

Workshops were the most popular NGC activity

75% of NGC visitors came to attend workshops. According to our participant survey results (See Appendix E), 49% of visitors want to see more workshops covering more topics at future NGC programs. The plant give-aways and green product retail drew far fewer attendees, possibly because the same materials were available at other locations throughout the city.



Participants in the Raised Bed building workshop.

Planning For the Future of the Neighborhood Grow Center

The goal of the Neighborhood Grow Center was to increase Baltimore City residents capacity to green vacant lots and implement stormwater management best practices at their homes and in their communities. By providing education and resources to over 200 city residents about these and other subjects, and by creating a venue for residents interested in greening to learn and network, we accomplished this goal and more.

However, the pilot project lasted only one month, leaving the question of how the NGC will evolve in the future. Based on lessons learned from the pilot project, BOS recommends considering the following scenarios:

Scenario One: Replication

Turning the NGC into an annual event hosted by the Office of Sustainability is one option. Staff at the Baltimore Community ToolBank welcome the idea of hosting the program again, and many participants expressed a desire for the program to be repeated. With much of the process and programming designed, replicating would be exponentially easier than creating the pilot. However, this would require annual fundraising, or the development of a different revenue model. It would also require the commitment of two BOS staff to run the program. At present, the BOS staff person that ran the pilot is on a temporary contract with the City, and his position may not exist in 2017.

Alternatively, the program could be replicated by a partner organization. The Department of Public Works, Parks and People Foundation, Baltimore Community ToolBank, and Details Deconstruction were all engaged in different aspects of the pilot, and could 'adopt' the program, changing it as needed to suit their goals and capacity.



Instructor and participants in the Plant Propagation workshop.

Scenario Two: Establish a Permanent Location

The City could identify a location where the NGC could exist on a permanent or seasonal basis. This could be in an underutilized city-owned property, a school with available space in the summer months, or a space leased from a partner organization. The benefit of this would be that over time, residents could learn about and come to rely on the NGC as a resource, and BOS would not have to re-program a host site's space. Additional costs would be incurred for maintaining and staffing such a facility, and it would not have the benefit of access to Baltimore Community ToolBank's vast library of tools.

In order to continue programming established in the pilot, a new space would need at a minimum:

- 400 sf of open workshop space
- 150 sf of retail space
- 100 sf of indoor storage space
- 400 sf of outdoor activity space
- Lighting, electricity, and HVAC
- Easy proximity to public transit
- 2 staff during open hours

Scenario 3: Dissemination

A third option would be to distribute the NGC programs over various locations throughout the city. For example, Brick & Board will be opening their own retail facility in Fall 2016. BOS could work with them to add other locally produced green products (like compost, mulch, and lumber) to their inventory, and the inventory of other appropriate retailers throughout Baltimore (Second Chance, The Loading Dock, and the Habitat for Humanity ReStore among them). These retail sites could also host the NGC workshops and networking events during off-hours. The NGC workshops could also exist as an annual series at any of the various makerspaces in the city.

BOS and DPW could facilitate these programs for partner organizations, and brand them as NGC events. In this scenario, the NGC is no longer a location, but a series of programs and events that happen throughout the city. Eventually, BOS and DPW could hand off ownership of these programs to partner organizations. This has already begun in a small way, by Baltimore Community ToolBank continuing to sell Chesapeake Compost Works products as a result of the NGC pilot.

Any of these above scenarios will require the ongoing efforts of at least one coordinator, either in city government, or at a community greening organization.



A satisfied customer purchasing reclaimed flooring to renovate his bathroom.



A Pointillist Chair is installed at the Remington Village Green Community Garden.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Deconstructed Design Competition Call-For-Entries

Appendix B: Neighborhood Grow Center Promotional Flyer

Appendix C: Neighborhood Grow Center Workshop Calendar

Appendix D: Program Final Budget

Appendix E: Participant Survey Results

Appendix F: Deconstructed Design Competition Winners