

Submitted to Colleen Murphy-Dunning, Director, Hixon Center for Urban Ecology
Summer Report for Web-site posting
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Starting a Community Forestry Project in Greater Boston

By Cindy Kushner

I started my summer internship expecting to see rundown patches of desolate neighborhood spots transformed into vibrant community spaces; I envisioned groups of school children working side by side parents and teachers, and finding those community leaders whose energy and commitment drew others onboard.

The summer got off to a slow start; but in the end, I found what I expected. Folks of all ages joined in fixing up their school yards, parks and streets. Efforts and participation are not yet widespread, but in a few key people lies hope that broken communities can come together.

As the first intern for the Community Forestry Partnership's Community Forester Program (CFP), led by the Urban Ecology Institute (UEI), I worked with three well-established non-profit groups on a variety of projects. Each had its own goals, though all ultimately hoping to build environmental stewardship and a stronger community. By bringing people together to improve physical spaces, we hoped to improve the urban forest (it's somewhat disperse, but yes, the urban forest is there!) and motivate people to come together and work in ways they may not have in the past.

I met with each group to discuss their goals, understand the potential of the site and design the improvements. We spoke about how to choose plants appropriate to the uses of the space, whether it was to improve aesthetics, provide shade or draw more birds and wildlife; and how to best maintain the site.

There were other projects where we were never able to get enough people from the community to make the project work. However, most of the groups accomplished what they wanted in their projects – and they now have the tools to continue to maintain and improve their community spaces.

Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH)

With the Neighborhood of Affordable Housing (NOAH) in East Boston, I worked with school committee groups at Otis and O'Donnell Elementary Schools. At each site, the commitment of a few dedicated parents and teachers should ensure the continued care of the schoolyard gardens.

The dedicated group at O'Donnell, ranging in age from the single digits to over 60, finishing the planting of five trees in the pouring rain – not the kind of pesky rain that coldly dots your head every few seconds, but the kind of downpour rain that makes you feel as though you are standing in a swimming pool rather than a playground. By the end of the planting, smiles and trees abounded.



O'Donnell before the planting



Parents, students and neighbors all help plant this Linden tree



Finishing touches and a quick lesson on to maintenance after the rain subsides!

Chelsea Greenspace

Over in Chelsea, Chelsea Green Space and Recreation Committee (Greenspace), led by the Youth Environmental Crew (the Crew - a group of high school interns) and with the involvement of the surrounding community, fixed up this patch of crime-ridden land adjacent to Malone Park. As the area is next to a well-maintained multi-use park, people - with the exception of shady nighttime dealings - just stayed away. The space is now inviting both to park users as well as wildlife, as plants were chosen particularly for their habitat value. As the Crew was digging holes and spreading mulch, a woman sat down with her baby and watched – most likely in a spot that she had never thought of visiting before.



Our site before...



During...



And After!



A woman with her baby uses a new area of the park while Greenspace digs a tree hole



Spreading mulch – lots of mulch!



The Crew at work

The site near Malone Park had a sizable area that had been used as a dumping ground for road sand and debris. As limited funding didn't allow us to provide the necessary topsoil required for planting trees and shrubs, we chose to make a wildflower field. By October, the field was beginning to fill in.

Wildflower Patch



May



August



October

East Boston Main Streets (EBMS)

Under the leadership of Board Member and Eastie Resident Ernie Torgersen, EBMS reached out to the businesses and residents of Maverick Square in a street tree planting effort. Led by Ernie's eternal energy, a team of five worked tirelessly into the night at Maverick Square to plant six street trees and add mulch and flowers around several other existing trees.



Maverick Square is a little brighter!



Ernie and Sherri Brokopp, UEI's program manager clean up after planting the first tree of the day



Working late into the night