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**Professional
Project Report**

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Redefining Columbus:

**Urban Agriculture as an Innovative Reuse Strategy
for the Remaining Columbus State Hospital Grounds
in the Hilltop**



**Prepared for Homes
on the Hill CDC**

&

**Urban and Regional
Planning Department
of Wisconsin-
Madison**

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Executive Summary

Redevelopment and reuse of vacant land is an issue persistently facing American cities - the reuse of the former Columbus State Hospital grounds in the Hilltop neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio is no exception. While largely redeveloped over the last 20 years, there remains a 20 acre area of the former grounds that, despite numerous efforts, has yet to be reused. The purpose of this project is to catalyze new ideas for redevelopment of the parcel for the core target audiences of Homes on the Hill CDC, as well as other local and citywide stakeholders in the reuse of the property. By providing an innovative idea for reusing the parcel, progressive conversation amongst these stakeholders can once again work towards meaningful redevelopment of the land. To advance dialogue for the site, this project takes into account past proposals, needs of the city and Hilltop neighborhood, context of the site itself, other successful redevelopment initiatives, and potential alternative uses.

Introduction: This Report with Regards to Urban Planning

As emphasized by the United Nations Development Programme, “inadequate stakeholder involvement is one of the most common reasons programmes and projects fail.”¹ Thus, engaging with and fostering collaboration of non-profit and community based organizations is essential to making development and – in the case of this report – redevelopment initiatives succeed. Redevelopment presents many opportunities such as historical preservation, sustainable designs and environmental justice, economic development, and can act as a revitalization tool.² However, stakeholder discussion is necessary to address redevelopment barriers such as absentee landlords, project costs, and lack of interest that exist to further strain the difficulty facing many urban neighborhoods.³ Furthermore, contextual barriers from site to site make it difficult to pinpoint a central strategy for effective redevelopment. Given this, numerous examples of how stakeholder discussion advances redevelopment are of the utmost importance to promoting similar outcomes nationally.⁴ A successful project on the former Columbus State Hospital grounds would provide an exceptional example of innovative reuse for large brownfield sites in urban areas nationwide and benefit the people of Columbus.

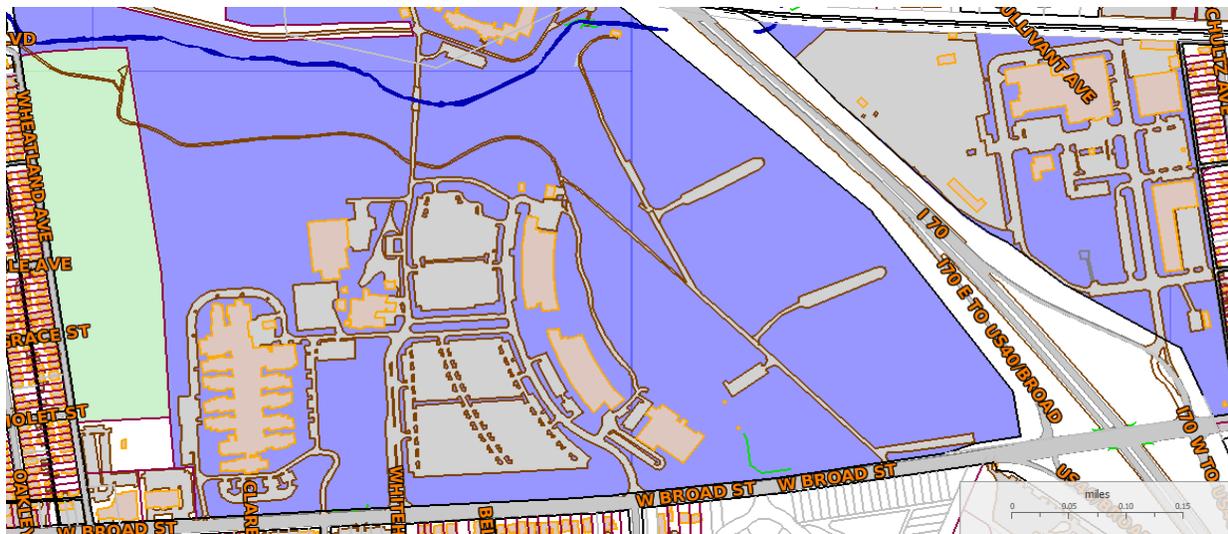


Figure 1) Location of Site in Former Grounds – purple is state-owned, green city-owned land

Green – North Wheatland Ave. Proposal Site	Purple – Former Hospital Grounds (Excluding Site)
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Map courtesy of Franklin County Auditor data. Produced by Geoff Hartnell Nov, 2014.

Objective

When catalyzing dialog planning for redevelopment, several factors must be taken into consideration: what kind of data will be needed, who will be involved, what has and has not worked elsewhere, what is needed, and what are the potential options for reuse? In the present scenario of the North Wheatland site, there is an identified issue of reuse regarding a vacant parcel within the Hilltop neighborhood. Additionally, a main stakeholder in Homes on the Hill CDC has also been (voluntarily) identified, with other vested interests in redevelopment of the site as well (such as the City of Columbus). Thus, the primary objective of this report is to catalyze meaningful discussion amongst these stakeholders focused on initiating a successful and sustained redevelopment project at the North Wheatland site. To accomplish the objective, this report offers a variety of questions towards reevaluating the site within the context of the Hilltop neighborhood and City of Columbus and suggests one potential use and subsequent inquiries to advance dialogue on that use. By analyzing and assessing the greater needs within the community itself, the shortcomings of past unsuccessful proposals, trends in the neighborhood, initiatives that have had success elsewhere, and other potential uses, this report aims to offer a breadth of information with which to reboot that process. This dialogue may include several factors - they are as follows:

- Past projects that have fallen short of successful redevelopment
- The needs and resources of the Hilltop community and how it relates to the city as a whole
- Benefits of local food systems

- A case study of another successful reuse initiative undertaken by The Urban Canopy of Chicago, IL
- Potential barriers to implementation of urban agriculture and other potential uses

This report has been prepared for Homes on the Hill CDC, to use and/or distribute as it deems appropriate.

The Hilltop Neighborhood

Home to about 70,000 residents – or about 8.9% of Columbus’ 2010 total population - and spanning nearly 16 square miles,⁵ the Hilltop community stands as the city’s largest neighborhood. Over the past several decades, the Hilltop has faced disinvestment typical of many rust belt communities. While the Hilltop exhibits higher homeownership rates than the city as a whole (~55% compared to 47.8%),⁶ the community displays higher rates of unemployment and less median household income than citywide averages as well as areas of food deserts and an abundance of vacant structures and land.⁷ However, from a positive perspective, new development such as the Penn Gaming casino and the Hilltop Homes I project, as well as funding for the completion of the Camp Chase Bike Trail demonstrates a healthy trend of new investment.⁸ Additionally, the neighborhood itself has exceptional connectivity due to the grid pattern of the streets, as well as good freeway access and public transportation.



Figure 2) Recently approved Camp Chase Bike Trail Improvement in the Hilltop; New Hollywood Casino (Opened Oct 8, 2012) also identified.

Map provided by The Columbus Dispatch

HILLTOP NEIGHBORHOOD WITHIN THE CITY OF COLUMBUS, OHIO



Figure 3) The area of Columbus, Ohio generally understood as the “Greater Hilltop” or “Hilltop” neighborhood – Defined by City of Columbus

<http://columbus.gov/areacommissions/greaterhilltop/>

Satellite image provided by Google Earth. 2014

Map produced by Angela Puerta and Geoff Hartnell. Nov, 2014.

Columbus

Columbus, Ohio, is a city that began a process of redefining itself near the turn of the century and has not looked back. Once a typical industrial city of the Midwest, Columbus finds itself as a diverse, up-and-coming city of the 21st century and continues to grow.⁹ Consistently, Columbus is noted as being one of the best cities for business to locate and people to live – Forbes has even declared it as the no. 1 up-and-coming city for tech development in the nation (2008).¹⁰ While there is much for the city to be proud of, Columbus also exhibits some shortcomings. Many less affluent areas of the city, the Hilltop included, are subject to large food deserts and thousands of residents find themselves without readily accessible healthy food options. Adding stress to the issue, an estimated 22% of the city’s residents are below the poverty line.¹¹ Furthermore, across the city there are numerous vacant municipally owned parcels, as demonstrated by the roughly 6200 properties in the Columbus City and Franklin County Land Banks.¹² The abundance of vacant land and developable area has created a competitive nature for public resources aimed towards redevelopment.³

Site Analysis - Past Projects for the Site

As aforementioned, redevelopment initiatives have been attempted for the site by numerous organizations over the last 20 years. Many of these previous development proposals have been focused on residential development ranging from senior housing, to affordable housing, a combination thereof, market rate, and even suburban style development. One project saw physical remediation of the site in 2006, but no further development was accomplished due to budgetary complications following the cleanup efforts.¹³



Figure 4.1) Remediation of former structure site looking towards North Wheatland Ave.



Figure 4.2) Remediation of former structure facing north.

Photographs for figures 4.1 & 4.2 provided by the Ohio Office of Redevelopment (2011)

The remediation work that was done allows for full and unrestricted land use and groundwater use on the site for any future development proposals.¹⁴ More recently, a LIHTC proposal put forward by The Woda Group, Inc. has been on the table since 2010 but has not received approval from the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) and remains stalled. A key question for stakeholders to consider could be why past projects have not been successful. Overall, vacancy rates in the Hilltop neighborhood are about 14% while the median home value sale was just over \$13,000 for the year of 2012.¹⁵ Stakeholders should contemplate together whether or not these persistently low home values and high vacancy are perpetuating difficulties in redeveloping the site and, if so, what kinds of alternative uses can be explored for future reuse initiatives.

Columbus and the Hilltop’s Shared Needs: Economic Development and Improved Food Access

Relative to the city of Columbus, the Hilltop exhibits slightly lower median household incomes and higher unemployment rates than the rest of the city, representing an elevated need for accessible amenities such as healthy foods. Though homeownership levels in the Hilltop are higher than that of Columbus, high vacancy rates of commercial and housing structures reflect

disinvestment in the community. Many areas are also underserved by other fresh food outlets such as farmers’ markets. Like other less affluent areas of the city, large parts of the Hilltop neighborhood fall within food deserts with no adequate source of fresh foods nearby. As defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), these food deserts are either identified a low access or low income communities,¹⁶

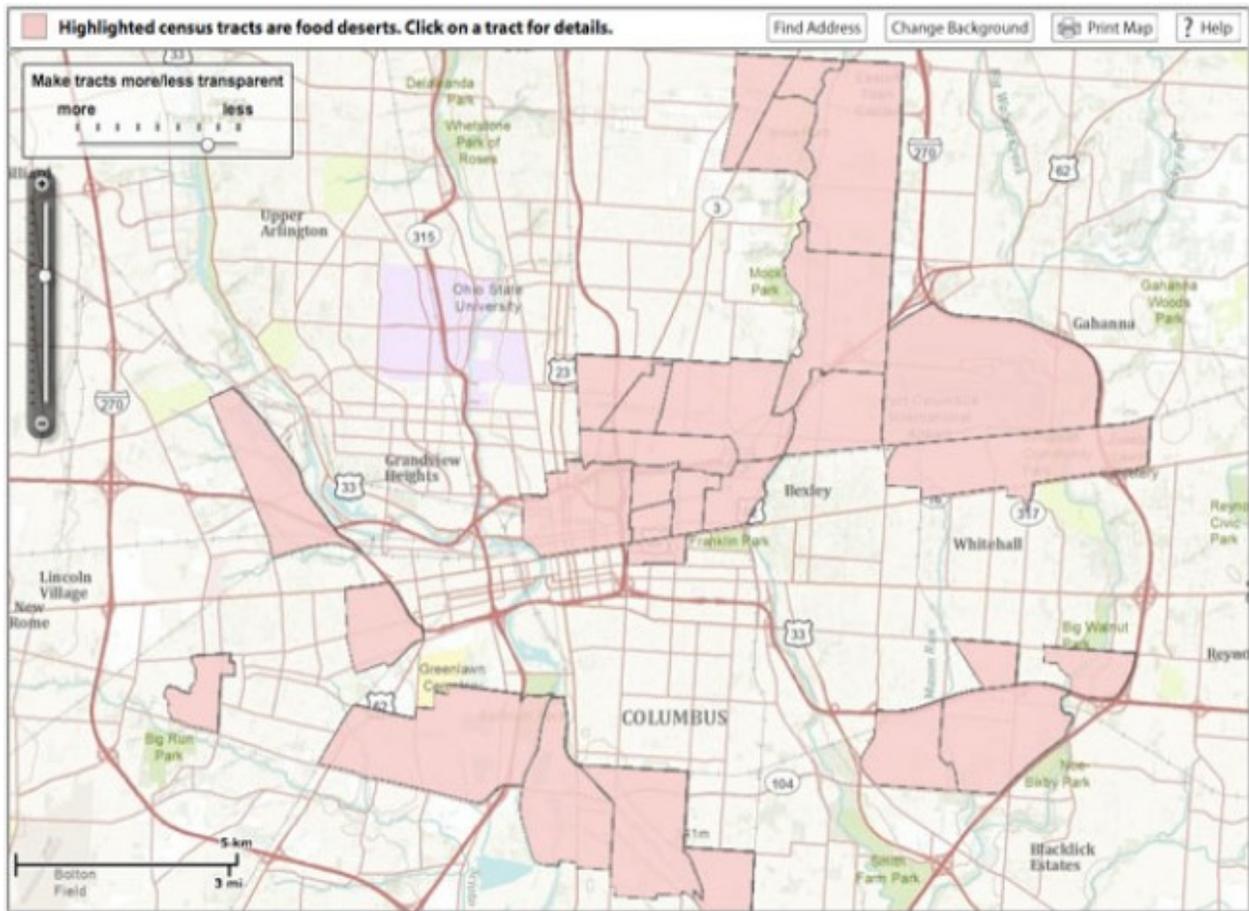


Figure 5) Food Deserts in the City of Columbus by census tract

Data and mapping tool provided by the USDA, map produced by The Columbus Underground (2009)

Food deserts, being known contributors to obesity and poor nutrition and also exacerbate income inequality, represent a serious issue facing the areas in highlighted census tracts of Columbus shown in Figure 5. Overall, the food deserts represented in Figure 5 directly affect over 100,000 residents within the City of Columbus.¹⁷ Throughout the city, farmer’s markets, grocery stores, and schools are also all significant drivers in the area for the need of fresh produce. Recent programs such as “Fresh Foods Here” by United Way, The Ohio State University’s “Farms to School” workshops, and the Columbus City School’s Wellness Initiative Act¹⁸ also act as clear indicators of a growing demand for fresh food accessibility. With regards to the prevalence of food deserts and other drivers of fresh food demand, there is but an overall need for increased

accessibility to fresh foods. Additionally, enterprises promoting new employment opportunities would significantly economic development within neighborhood. Given this, stakeholders can engage in discussion of how to address the issues facing their community. Stakeholders may then ask if redevelopment at the vacant North Wheatland site can potentially be applied to increasing fresh food availability and mitigating the negative externalities associated with food deserts. Stakeholders could also consider ways in which job creation in food production or processing or waste disposal could promote higher accessibility to fresh foods and vice-versa within context of the North Wheatland site. Importantly, however, stakeholders should also question what other potential needs of the community might be and compare priorities of those needs.

Zoning Questions Regarding the North Wheatland Site

The site in this proposal has been identified by the City of Columbus as one of the top priority redevelopment opportunities in the Hilltop area in its Greater Hilltop Plan Amendment.¹⁹ The site itself is a 20 acre parcel located on the east side of North Wheatland Avenue about one city block (.1 miles) north of West Broad Street – Columbus’ main east-west commercial corridor and thoroughfare. While largely a flat, grassy field, there is a small downhill and wooded area near the north end of the lot. Currently, the site is split up between two types of zoning, ‘neighborhood general’ on the grass field and ‘neighborhood edge’ on the wooded slope.¹⁹ Such zoning is intended explicitly for the development of traditional neighborhood mixed-use development. To commit to other types of redevelopment, a developer would first have to attend a public hearing before the board of zoning adjustment to change the zoning on the site to their specifications. Given the current status of the site and failure of past projects, is it possible that zoning presents a barrier towards redevelopment? In this sense, stakeholders should discuss whether the current zoning limits possibilities for redevelopment as well as if required efforts to change zoning to accommodate alternative uses create a significant obstacle in those processes. If alternative uses were to be explored, stakeholders would then want to examine which parties within city government would be necessary allies in initiating that change.

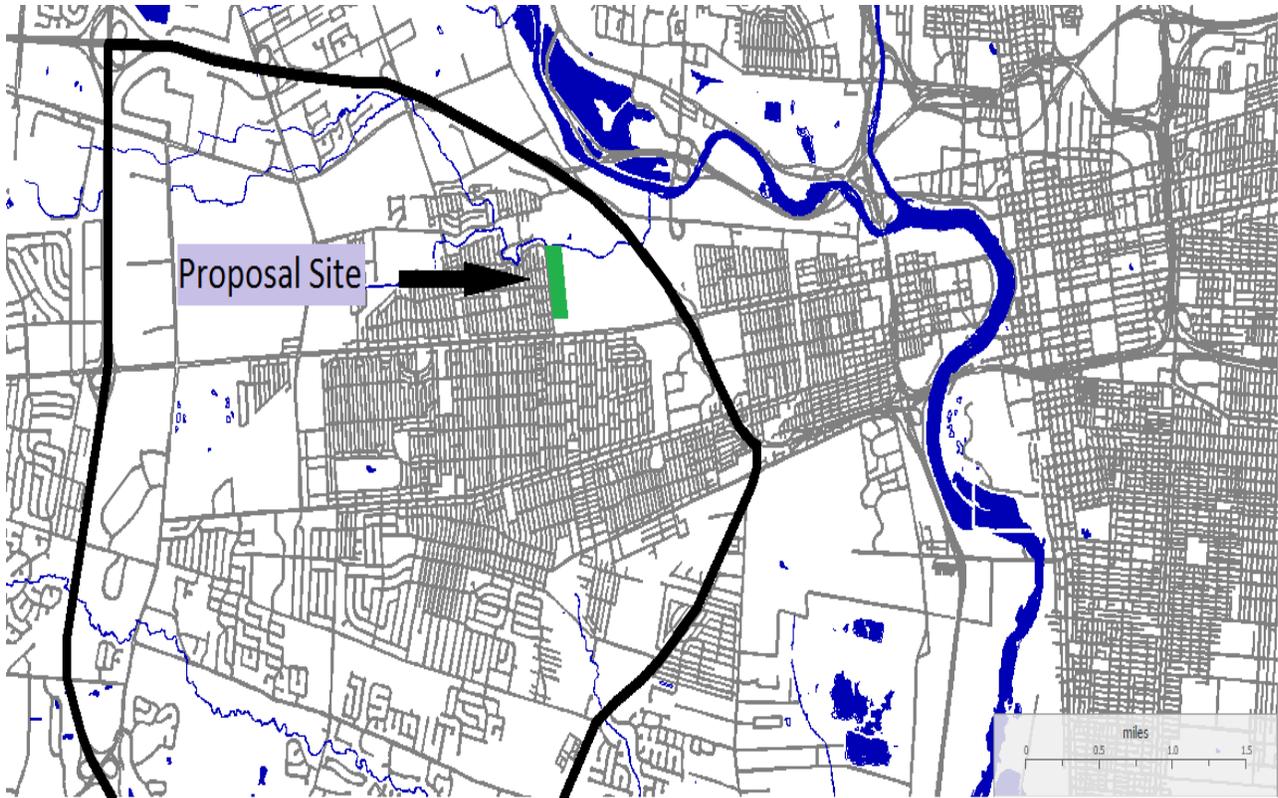


Figure 6) North Wheatland proposal site within the Hilltop neighborhood

Map courtesy of Franklin County Auditor data. Produced by Geoff Hartnell Nov, 2014.

Advancing Dialogue about Urban Agriculture as a Potential Reuse

As aforementioned, growing demands for and limited accessibility of large populations to fresh food options are key issues facing Columbus and the Hilltop. Posed to stakeholders earlier in this report is a question focused on if the 20 acre vacant North Wheatland site could be redeveloped to a use that might address these matters. To catalyze such dialogue, this report offers a vision of a potential reuse strategy that could confront the needs of the community: redevelopment driven by transforming the North Wheatland site into agricultural production. This vision would see approximately 5.8 acres of wooded area preserved on the north end of the site, with 14.2 remaining acres available for workable agricultural land. By emphasizing the possibilities of urban agriculture at the site, stakeholders can interact to more effectively conceptualize potential redevelopment of the land.

Figure 7) Suggested land use at site



Satellite image provided by Google Earth. 2014
Map produced by Angela Puerta and Geoff Hartnell. Nov, 2014.

Figure 8) Potential: example from Milwaukee

Pictures are of The Growing Power Organization's food production operations in Milwaukee, WI – *Courtesy of <http://www.splendidtable.org/>*



These images depict the potential of urban agriculture as a method of reusing vacant/underutilized urban land.



Questions to Consider about the Resources Available

In undertaking a project at the North Wheatland site guided by the principals of urban agriculture, certain resources at the community and city level can make an enormously significant impact towards a successful and sustained venture. At the community level, the Hilltop exhibits a strong network of community resource networks, such as the Shalom Zone, Homes on the Hill CDC, and the Hilltop Business Association (HBA) that can be utilized to involve stakeholders, and assist business start-up or public-private partnerships. At the municipal level, Columbus also has several tools at its disposal to encourage economic growth on the site and throughout the city. For small business incentives, for example, the city also provides many financing opportunities as well as the Green Columbus Fund (up to \$200,000) for the reuse of brownfield sites. The Green Columbus Fund is not limited to remediation work, and a project on the North Wheatland site would be able to apply for these funds for any type of sustainable reuse such as urban agriculture. The city also retains the power to provide tax abatement for development projects in priority areas of the city.

Many of the stakeholders in redeveloping the North Wheatland site are affiliated with the community resource networks of the Hilltop and/or with the City of Columbus. As such, stakeholders should discuss what organizational strengths they can bring towards redevelopment, potential partnerships, and what other parties they may want to involve. Furthermore, discussing organizational capacities and opportunities can advance informed collaboration regarding what types of initiatives might be most sustainable. This also brings up questions to stakeholders regarding what kind of financing is available, where that financing may come from, and the initial size of investment with subsequent growth considerations. To that extent, will initial investment begin focused towards redeveloping a majority of the North Wheatland site upfront or is beginning with a pilot program more prudent? These considerations are exemplified later in this report with regards to the case study of The Urban Canopy in Chicago, IL. With these dialogues, stakeholders can more effectively focus toward initiating redevelopment strategies.

Dialogue Regarding the Benefits of Implementing Urban Agriculture

Increasing stakeholder awareness of the benefits of implementing urban agriculture at the North Wheatland site is paramount for meaningful discussion. In this regard, highlighting the positive aspects of this potential scenario puts the possibility of this use into perspective for vested parties to compare alternatives with. Regarding positive externalities, local food systems have an abundance of beneficial effects towards the communities in which they are a part. Economically, the growth and distribution of local foods has been found to increase money retained by the producer and within the area. Moreover, job growth and sales revenues also result in additional local economic activity. Environmentally, decreased traffic miles and time of food distribution allows for less consumption of resources and fewer emissions. Locally, public health is improved due to the presence and availability of fresh food. Also, as demonstrated by Morales (2011),²⁰ theories regarding social aspects of communities with a presence of local food systems consistently point towards improved social well-being. Reports prepared by Rebecca Dunning for the North Carolina Cooperative Extension²¹ and the USDA highlight several research statistics and findings regarding these benefits. A few of these results are as follows:

- Research finds that the number of small business owners, including small and medium sized farms, contributes to community health, where indicators of community health include level of inequality, poverty, and unemployment (Goldschmidt 1946, working paper; Tolbert, Lyson & Irwin 1998).
- The nutritional quality of fruits and vegetables is highest right after harvest and then declines with time (Edwards-Jones 2010; Favell 1998).
- The most direct way that expansion in local food systems could impact local economies is through import substitution. If consumers purchase food produced within a local area instead of imports from outside the area, sales are more likely to accrue to people and

businesses within the area. This may then generate additional economic impacts as workers and businesses spend the additional income on production inputs and other products within the area (Swenson, 2009).

When considering the benefits of fresh food accessibility, stakeholders should ask how local food systems can be best utilized within context of the North Wheatland site; in that regard, how can implementation of local food systems at the site produce similar results in Columbus? In addition, stakeholders should consider the inputs that go into creating a successful local food network and barriers to implementation when considering reuse strategies for the site. Relative to the potential benefits and barriers, stakeholders should also discuss the trade-offs between the potential of urban agriculture and other potential uses for the site.

Case Study of The Urban Canopy, Chicago, IL

Trying to implement urban agriculture effectively on unused land has not only been successfully accomplished elsewhere in the Midwest, it has been done so by a private start-up business. Alex Poltorak founded The Urban Canopy in 2010 to address limited accessibility of fresh foods by school children in Chicago. Poltorak’s main mission for the urban canopy is two-fold; help provide equitable accessibility to fresh food in Chicago and earn a living doing it.²²



Figure 9) The Urban Canopy’s earliest venture – wheatgrass production

Picture provided by <http://seedsowgrow.wordpress.com/2013/11/09/urban-canopy-chicago/> (2013)

The Urban Canopy started as a shared vision among Poltorak and his colleagues: a company that could provide localized solutions for populations lacking adequate accessibility of fresh food throughout the city. The Urban Canopy initially piggybacked a similar project in Chicago, “The Plant Chicago,” and, in cooperation with that organization, began a pilot rooftop program at the ‘Plant’s’ site in the city’s Southside. By utilizing a combination of management skills, labor, and

sweat equity, The Urban Canopy has found a niche and established itself in very short order. Beginning with its pilot program in 2011, The Urban Canopy has expanded to an indoor growing space, several community garden areas, employs 2 additional full-time employees, and utilizes two 2-acre farms in the Englewood and Bronzeville neighborhoods of south Chicago - all in just three years.²³



Figure 10) One of two urban farms operated by The Urban Canopy; this farm here is located on a parking lot just off of 76th Street on Chicago's South Side.

Photo provided by Charles Androsky (Oct 25, 2014)



Figure 11) The Urban Canopy at the Columbus Farmers' Park Market – Direct food sales support the main goals of the company while helping it financially.

Photo provided by The Urban Canopy (2014)



Figure 12) Several composting piles utilized for The Urban Canopy's production.

Photo provided by Charles Androsky (Oct 25, 2014)

The Urban Canopy provides an exceptional example of how urban agriculture can be a profitable and sustainable business that benefits the community as a whole. When analyzing The Urban Canopy as a case example, stakeholders should ask what similarities exist between the urban environment Poltorak has found success in and that of Columbus as well as account for potential differences. In doing so, dialogue regarding what types of similar and contrasting approaches should be considered in potential agricultural-based redevelopment can also help stakeholders assess the feasibility of that potential use as well as to identify particular strengths and barriers to implementation that may be present. Through these types of conversations, examining The Urban Canopy as a case study can enhance stakeholder dialogue regarding redevelopment.

Specific Barriers to Urban Agriculture that Should be Discussed

Commonly, barriers take shape in the form of political and financial barriers, resource oriented mismatches of production capacity, or combinations of these issues.²⁴ Political barriers are often created as concerns are raised regarding what integrating urban agriculture into the city culture might mean. Financially, an agricultural operation must also be able to make enough money to sustain itself and accrue the inputs, such as water, necessary to produce food. Moreover, while it may less costly than other development initiatives, urban agriculture still has significant start up and maintenance costs to consider. Furthermore, lack of ability to meet volume demands and seasonable availability of produce could act as additional impediments towards urban farming.

Additional considerations:

- (Estimate) Materials and preparation to start fresh on a .5 acre (21,000 sq. ft.) plot would cost about \$25,000.²⁵
- A proposal guided by urban agriculture would need the city's board of zoning to approve rezoning the site.

When considering urban agriculture as a potential reuse strategy, stakeholders should take into account the aforementioned impediments to sustaining such a venture. In doing so, stakeholders should be led to ask questions regarding what solutions are available to potential barriers, who might need to be involved in those solutions, and how the redevelopment and use would be managed. By discussing these types of considerations, stakeholders can better assess the feasibility of urban agriculture as a potential reuse of the North Wheatland site.

Conclusion

Dialogue between stakeholders is the backbone of successful planning projects. In the context of the Hilltop, both the City of Columbus Economic Development & Planning Department and primary stakeholder (Homes on the Hill CDC) have identified the North Wheatland site of the former Columbus State Hospital grounds as a primary target of redevelopment in the neighborhood. While there have been several proposals for redevelopment of the 20 acre site, progress has remained insignificant and dialogue between stakeholders has stalled. To once again work towards meaningful redevelopment of the vacant land, this report aims to reestablish stakeholder dialogue by providing an array of questions focused on reevaluating the site. By also offering a vision of urban agriculture as a potential driver for reuse of the land, stakeholders may engage in discussion of how such a use could address needs of the community and accomplish purposeful redevelopment of the site. By focusing on considerations regarding why past proposals have not met success, what needs face Columbus and the Hilltop and possibilities for addressing them, potential benefits and barriers to urban agriculture, and initiatives that have worked elsewhere, this report aims for stakeholders to discuss those considerations so as to reinvigorate overall dialogue regarding reuse of the site. In doing so, stakeholder dialogue may once again work towards achieving meaningful redevelopment of the North Wheatland site.

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