

By all accounts, even in its most ambitious plans, the Walnut Hill Community Farm’s board of advisors didn’t even go this far. Not in its first two years, at least. The coalition of interests that supported the project from its inception – from the City of Philadelphia’s Mayor’s Office of Sustainability to SEPTA to TEC itself – envisioned a park that would serve as a foundation for TEC’s planned Center for Culinary Enterprises. It could not have anticipated that in 30 months, a vacant parcel of land would be transformed into such a vibrant, self-sustaining model for neighborhood transformation.

Through community engagement, visionary leadership, and an array of unconventional partnerships (at least 20 different organizations have partnered in some way), this is exactly what has happened. The Walnut Hill Community Farm is a model of home-grown sustainability for other neighborhoods in Philadelphia, and other cities across the United States, to follow. SEPTA is proud to be a partner.

PARTNER	PRIMARY ROLE(S)
Central City Toyota	Construct pocket park & farm
Common Market	Fruit for farm stand
Community Design Collaborative	Design of pocket park & farm
Corporation for National Community Service - AmeriCorps VISTA	Staff support
Deloitte	Volunteers, tools, storage shed
Drexel University	Redesign of farm irrigation system, purchase of solar panels and water pump
Farm to City	Host for CSA and farm stands
Penn State Cooperative Extension - Philadelphia County	High tunnel & nutrition education
Philadelphia Department of Streets	Debris cleaning and top soil; support from Mayor Michael Nutter
PECO Green Region Municipal Open Space Grant (Natural Lands Trust)	Construct pocket park & farm
Philadelphia Horticultural Society (PHS) City Harvest Growers Program	Seeds, mulch & farm supplies
Philadelphia Orchard Project	Orchard trees & volunteers
Philadelphia Urban Food and Fitness Alliance (PUFFA)	Staff support & food access advocacy
Philly Rooted	Staff support & farming technical assistance
Philly Stake	Farm irrigation system
SHARE's Nice Roots Program	Soil supplier
Southeast Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)	Land, labor & supplies for farm and water harvesting system for irrigation
USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program	Construct pocket park & farm stand, purchase solar lights & cisterns, staff support to increase food access
University City Green (UC Green)	Tools & supplies
Urban Tree Connection	Connections with other city neighborhoods; Neighborhood Foods partner



SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAM

Case Study 001

Title: “Growing” Partnerships for Sustainability in West Philadelphia
Date: Aug. 8, 2012
Source: The Enterprise Center CDC

Sustainability at SEPTA is about more than building a sustainable transit system. It is about building a sustainable transit system that promotes an economically prosperous, socially equitable, and environmentally responsible region.

Since March 2010, SEPTA has been involved in a partnership at the 46th Street Station in West Philadelphia that illustrates this inclusive, triple bottom line approach to sustainability. There, **The Enterprise Center Community Development Corporation (TEC)** has led a collaborative project to transform a vacant parcel of land adjacent to the station building into a platform for neighborhood transformation.

But it all started with a vacant parcel of land.

Or more accurately, several vacant parcels of land, all originally purchased by SEPTA for the purpose of reconstructing the 46th Street Station building on the Market-Frankford Line, an elevated structure running along Market Street in West Philadelphia. Upon completion of construction in 2009, SEPTA no longer needed the land. TEC, which had established its own presence in the nearby former “American Bandstand” building, approached SEPTA about possibilities to put the land into productive use. Thousands of Philadelphians would pass this plot of land on their way to and from the station each day. Why not turn this vacant plot of land into a community asset?

But what kind of asset? It turned out that TEC, which serves the West Philadelphia neighborhood of Walnut Hill, had an idea. Behind the scenes, the wheels had already begun to turn on a vision to establish a new neighborhood Center for Culinary Enterprises (CCE). The CCE would provide Walnut Hill residents with educational opportunities to promote sustainable food production. And what better way to start than by teaching them how to grow it themselves, in their own neighborhood? The idea for the Walnut Hill Community Farm was born.



In May 2010, SEPTA and TEC agreed on a \$1 per year lease for 10 years, with four five year options to extend the terms of the lease for up to 30 years. With the land in hand, TEC tapped into its network of “Community Leaders” to engage the surrounding community in designing the farm. Three themes emerged from this engagement process. The farm should: 1) Provide a new place where neighbors can congregate (a “sitting” park); 2) Engage neighborhood youth in entrepreneurship; and 3) Have attractive beds for community and youth-oriented farming.

These guidelines shaped the farm’s initial conceptual design. TEC partnered with the **Community Design Collaborative** to host a charette to engage stakeholders in the design process. In April 2010, a massive neighborhood clean-up effort was undertaken under the auspices of the “Philly Spring Clean Up” Day. The City of Philadelphia **Streets Department** assisted with concrete removal following a site visit from Mayor Michael Nutter. Soon thereafter, the parcel was ready for its transformation.

The **Pennsylvania Horticultural Society**, through its City Harvest Growers Alliance grant, provided TEC with farming supplies, seeds, top soil and mulch for the beds for farming for three years. The **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)**, **PECO Energy**, and **Central City Toyota**, a business in the Walnut Hill community, chipped in funding for construction.

But soon, technical problems emerged. Among them was a question of how would the beds for farming would be irrigated. TEC staff did not have the resources to water the beds manually, and there was no nearby water hook-up available. Irrigation would be needed. But how? And with what money?

TEC and SEPTA brainstormed ideas. The result was a strategy to irrigate the farm using two 1100 gallon cisterns. But where would the cisterns get their water? Hooking up to a city water main would be too costly; manually filling would be too labor-intensive. But connecting up with SEPTA’s station gutter system would provide a sustained source of water for irrigation – from the sky.

With support from the **USDA**, TEC purchased the cisterns, and with support from **Philly Stake**, the irrigation system. **SEPTA**, with its own funds, installed



the piping to connect the cistern with the station building’s downspout. The farm had water, and with that, it began to grow produce.

Over the next two years, more than a half-dozen other local and national organizations contributed resources to staff the farm. Among them:

Common Market: Supplies fruit to farm stand

Deloitte: Funded TEC staff time, farm volunteers and tools, and a new storage shed through a City of Philadelphia Business Privilege Tax Credit Incentive program.

AmeriCorps: Funded TEC staff time on the project

Philadelphia Urban Food & Fitness Alliance (PUFFA): Funded TEC staff time through the Health Promotion Council and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation

Philadelphia Orchard Project: Funded volunteer work days and supplied orchard trees

Philly Rooted: Funded volunteer time focused on leveraging the farm for youth engagement

SHARE’s Nice Roots Farm: Supplies soil

The Fruit Guys: Supplied fruit bushes

UC Green: Funded tools and supplies for work days

Soon thereafter, TEC partnered with **Farm to City** on an effort to ensure that sales locations for its produce would accept Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT)/Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps. This partnership ensures access to low income residents. Farm to City also provided its Senior Farmers Market Program to serve as a linkage to the elderly, an increasingly vulnerable portion of Philadelphia’s population. These partnerships, coupled with the farm’s strategic location at a key crossroads of SEPTA’s system, have helped maximize access to the farm and its produce for all Philadelphians.



In 2011, its first full year of production, the farm grew more than 650 pounds of food and employed four growers on a part-time basis. TEC operated three farm stands and sold six farm shares through a pilot Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, which were reduced-rated low income shares for neighborhood residents. In 2012, TEC has sought to expand the depth and breadth of this CSA program by engaging in new partners. For example, Drexel University will be responsible for redesigning the farm’s irrigation system. Part of this project will include the installation of solar panels on SEPTA’s station building to power the irrigation system’s electricity demand. The panels will be mounted on the side of the station building – SEPTA will provide the necessary shelving. The solar panels will complement the existing solar lighting that will be installed as a part of the USDA grant.

TEC will also be redoubling its efforts to engage Walnut Hill youths at the park – one of the three priorities established during the initial community engagement process. A new youth food ambassadors program will focus on the basics of business education by enabling community youths to participate as entrepreneurs in the CSA program. In 2011, four youths participated in a pilot program. In 2012, TEC intends to expand youth participation to ten.

New to the farm in 2012 is an effort to connect Walnut Hill with other city neighborhoods. TEC will offer a tiered rate structure for non-Walnut Hill residents and partner with the Urban Tree Connection “Neighborhood Foods” program, which currently has 60 CSA shares at four pickup locations and farm stands. The multiple SEPTA routes that service the 46th Street Station area position the farm well to serve other neighborhoods across the city.

Also new is a sharper focus on nutrition education initiatives. For this, Penn State University’s Cooperative Extension (Philadelphia County) was brought into the fold to work with consumers, including a targeted pilot campaign with SEPTA employees. SEPTA will work with the Penn State team to introduce employees to healthy food options, food budgeting, meal planning and cooking. Penn State will join the SEPTA Wellness Team at several SEPTA locations to teach employees how they can easily add healthy foods into their daily living. Penn State will also fund the installation of a high tunnel at the farm to allow for more predictable conditions during the growing season.