



Marygrove Green Alley

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Executive Summary

1. Project Partner

The Marygrove Community Association (MCA), founded in 2015, fosters community-driven change with its diverse residents. As Graham Scholars, we are working with the MCA to ensure the Green Alley Project and community events reflect the needs of all residents. We've closely collaborated with Jay Meeks, MCA Secretary and Program Manager for Learning, Equity, and Engagement for Public Good, and Rachel Cappadona, MCA Director.

2. Introduction & Project Background

This project aimed at developing green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) for a decommissioned alley space in the Marygrove neighborhood in Detroit. This project shifted from initial plans of GSI implementation to a green community space in the alley. Throughout the planning stages of our project, we developed and implemented climate resilience building goals through education, information, events, and workshopping with the localized community.

3. Activities

We attended and organized a number of community events, including the LEAPS launch, MCA Holiday Bazaar, and Green Alley Town Hall. In the summer, intern Jasmine Paulk helped to organize and attend monthly community events, including a Juneteenth event with Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network (DBCFSN), a DIY air filter event with The Ecology Center, and a pollinator education event.

We interviewed three professionals with different areas of expertise to inform our project approach. Team members spoke to Joshua Newell, Paul Draus, and Palencia Mobley, about sustainability projects in urban spaces, community engagement and education, and project logistics, respectively.

4. Deliverables

Our team produced four key deliverables. 1) Community engagement plan: outlines plans for sustained engagement and provides project background. 2) Surveys from Holiday Bazaar: provides preliminary data about community use of outdoor green space. 3) Town Hall Event: a forum in which Marygrove residents were offered a menu of options for the green alley and invited to construct their vision for the space. 4) Drawing and Rendering: illustrate potential uses for green alley and the Indiana Street Garden.

5. Anticipated Impact

As this project continues with the incoming cohort of Graham Scholars, we anticipate the deliverables from our project to have both short and long term impacts for the future of the

project and the Marygrove community. The drawings and renderings of the green alley will be used in grant applications to secure more funding for projects within the green alley. As outlined by our community engagement plan, the Marygrove Community Association used the green alley and its surrounding green spaces for educational programming over the summer, led by our team member Jasmine Paulk. The installation of GSI in the alley will reduce flooding damage in the Marygrove community, and the green space will boost climate resilience in the Marygrove community.

6. Recommendations

In the future, recommendations reside among a large importance of maintaining this project. Some include; A continuation of events in the community spaces of Marygrove with examples provided, development of a structured planning of the community garden, grant funding to implement more GSI aspects, and extending the community engagement plan. Ownership of these spaces will help the success and sustainability of them.

Introduction and Background

Project Partner

Marygrove is home to diverse groups of residents. The Marygrove Conservancy is a P-20 campus in the neighborhood that serves children from preschool through two years of college. There are also Theresa Maxis, a retirement community, and COTS Peggy's Place, a homeless shelter. The Marygrove Community Association (MCA) was founded in 2015 to facilitate community driven change. As Graham Scholars, we are working with MCA to ensure that the Green Alley Project and community engagement events reflect the diverse needs of Marygrove residents. We have collaborated closely with Jay Meeks, the Secretary of the MCA and Program Manager for the Learning, Equity, and Engagement for Public Good Program, as well as with Rachel Cappadona, the Director of the MCA.

Project Background

This project includes the development of a green alley space in the Marygrove neighborhood. It began with a scope to implement GSI into the Marygrove Community space that will reduce local flooding and save taxpayer dollars. A decommissioned alleyway between Indian Street Garden and Kentucky Street/Huntington Park is currently paved in concrete, un-level, and being taken over by tree roots. The deliverables aimed to formally lay out a plan for future implementation of a green arts alley. As research and conversations developed, a shift in our project scope occurred. We found that with our limited resources and restrictions, the implementation of GSI through infrastructural intervention would not be feasible. Our scope began to focus on how create a green community space that serves both ecological and social purposes, including sustainability education and community engagement to support MCA's goal of building climate resiliency.

Project Goals

The primary goal of this project is to build climate resilience by combining ecological sustainability with community engagement and education. Additionally, creating an accessible, inclusive community space helps reinforce social connections, which are key to community resilience in the face of environmental challenges.

Through community visioning and workshopping, the project actively involves local residents in decision-making processes, ensuring that the space meets the community's needs and reflects their collective aspirations. This participatory approach strengthens the sense of ownership, making the space not only a physical infrastructure but a space for developing community empowerment and climate action.

Methods

Community Engagement & Education

We sought to define project criteria through community engagement, determining the wants and needs of Marygrove residents in their existing, developing, and future green spaces. We engaged community members in conversation by attending, planning, and hosting a number of community events with an emphasis on education.

The first community event we attended was the LEAPS launch in October of 2023, which included a City Institute bus tour around Fitzgerald and surrounding Detroit neighborhoods, grounding us in their history and context. In November, we attended the Holiday Bazaar, which was an opportunity to meet Marygrove residents and engage the community in conversation around a potential future green alley. In April of 2024, we co-hosted a Green Alley Town Hall with MCA at Live6 Homebase, which presented an opportunity for a longer conversation with more community members about what a Green-Arts Alley may look like and how it functions.

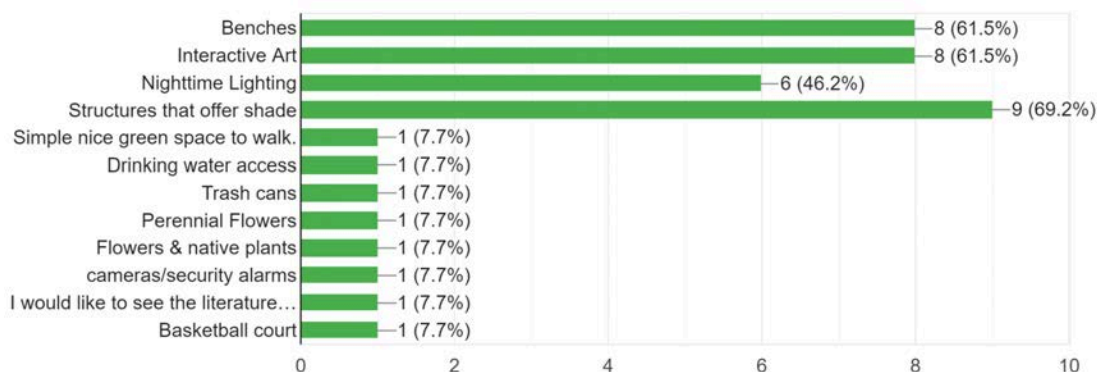
Summer events were educational, focusing on sustainability knowledge and climate resiliency practices. Summer intern Jasmine Paulk helped to organize a Juneteenth event surrounding Black foodways & food sovereignty with MCA and Patti from Detroit People’s Food Co-op/DBCFSN and a pollinator education event – with plant identification and birdhouse construction and decoration – in August. She also attended the DIY box fan air filter event & ice cream social co-hosted by the Ecology Center in July. Education was also implemented through the development of garden signage – with plant identification and harvest instructions – as well as community garden work & conversations.

Green Alley Survey & Results

After an initial brief survey about Marygrove residents’ behaviors and preferences for the outdoors, we developed two iterations of a green alley survey for Marygrove residents, one of which asks for optional demographic information and preferences in a Green-Arts Alley space. This survey remains embedded in the Marygrove Community Association website to collect information from the site’s visitors.

Check what you'd want to see in green spaces in your neighborhood.

13 responses



The other iteration of this survey was specific to the town hall, where it was first presented to community members. Town hall participants were invited to fill out the survey and participate in two visioning activities. They were then shown a series of two images side by side—some with GSI structures, different greenspace uses, and outdoor infrastructure—and asked to pick their preference within each set. This was a warmup for the following activity, in which attendees were then asked to create collages that could include elements they would like to see in the green space (Appendix A). If people did not feel comfortable collaging, they were invited to draw or discuss. Survey responses and visualizations were used to inform the rendering later produced.

Detroit Green Stormwater Infrastructure Research

Looking through the projects archived on the [Detroit Stormwater Hub](#) website, we selected a handful of sites whose design approaches and infrastructure may be able to inform our work. From porous pavers to permeable asphalt to bioretentive native plant gardens - we identified potential GSI implementation methods. Because our project goals were to mitigate symptoms of climate change (i.e. basement flooding) and build climate resilience, we initially hoped to incorporate both permeable pavers and bioretention strategies.

Interviews

We conducted three interviews with individuals well versed in urban ecology, community engagement, and GSI to further inform our approach to this project. Sarah Bayne interviewed Joshua Newell, a professor at University of Michigan’s School of Environment and Sustainability about logistical and community impact implications of sustainability projects in urban spaces. Bailee Duke then interviewed Paul Draus, professor of sociology at UM-Dearborn and Faculty Director of the UM Detroit Center, about community engagement and education. Paul also shared an [Urban Acupuncture Toolkit](#) with the team.

Updates

Finally, we collectively interviewed Palencia Mobley, former Chief Engineer of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department. Through this conversation, we learned more about Detroit’s combined water and sewer system and its functionality, along with some of the cost and logistical obstacles to the implementation of GSI in the alley between the Indiana Street Garden and Huntington Community Park. Here, the scope of our project changed – the aim to build climate resilience in the Marygrove neighborhood remained unchanged, but it became clear that an infrastructural intervention was beyond our reach.

Deliverables

Community Engagement Plan

This plan will serve as a guide for securing grant funding and will also act as a blueprint for community members, the MCA, and future Graham Scholars as they work to implement the green alley project. The introduction details the history of the neighborhood and the other green projects that have already been completed there. It also includes the benefits of implementing the alley and the methodologies that we had used to date in collecting information from the community about how the green alley can best serve community needs. The second section details the events that we attended from 2023-2024 and the types of data collection that were conducted at the meetings. The final section provides planned events—a Juneteenth Barbeque, Community Movie Night, Bird House/Rock Painting Night, and Neighborhood Field Day—that were then used by the MCA throughout the summer of 2024 to lay a foundation for community engagement in the outdoors and soon to be green alley.

Holiday Bazaar Surveys

The MCA hosts a Holiday Bazaar every year, and in November of 2023, we attended to survey and begin collecting community visions for the green alley. We had a large poster board in which attendees were prompted to write down words and images based on the following prompt: “What do you think of when you imagine a community park?” There was an additional fill-in-the-blank in which respondents were asked to answer questions about perceived barriers to spending time outdoors, prior knowledge of stormwater infrastructure, desirable park features, and why they spend time outdoors. The responses and recipient demographics were coded into a spreadsheet. The data has informed our understanding of existing outdoor use and perceptions of outdoor space in the community.

Town Hall Event

In Spring 2024, along with the MCA, we hosted a Town Hall Event with one goal in mind: to present a menu of options for the green alley and have people construct their vision for the space. We presented the work that the MCA has already done, who we are, and why GSI is important for the community. This included specific examples of what everyday GSI looks like and case studies of nearby GSI projects.

Drawings and Renderings

During the summer, Graham intern and architecture student Jasmine Paulk drafted drawings for the Green Alley (Appendix B). They included elements such as wayfinding signage, a shipping container mural, sail canopies for shade, and plants for rainwater management. The renderings detail plans for Indiana Street Garden, including tree species and placement for a fruiting forest, a sunflower strip, pollinator garden, herb garden, and an outdoor kitchen. Indiana Street Garden is one of the green spaces that will be connected to Huntington Community Park by the alley (Appendix C).

Recommendations

Expand the Community Engagement Plan

This space fosters connections for the Marygrove community. Recommendations for this project would include a continuation of regularly scheduled events. Many of the current events are promoted through the Marygrove Community Association and update members on the newsletter, email, and social media. Special events and garden work days are some that are promoted here. Aid in the structure of this process will help sustain engagement, promote educational outreach, and enhance the space's visibility.

Engaging the community through outreach programs, workshops, and volunteer opportunities will ensure the space continues to meet the needs of the people it serves. An extended engagement plan could include collaborations with schools, businesses, and community organizations, fostering deeper connections. The ability and encouragement to have community members take ownership of the space could increase long-term sustainability. Establishing a volunteer stewardship program or adopting a section of the space could provide a sense of pride and responsibility, ensuring the space remains well-maintained.

Bolster Community Garden Initiatives

The community garden can provide numerous benefits for utilization of this space in the community. It would encourage collaboration among local residents, volunteers, and organizations. This initiative could also serve as a model for sustainable urban gardening. The bolstering of this space through the utilization of outdoor kitchen space like additions of garden-fresh meals with a continuation of the pavilion for a MCA meeting space are among more methods to improve and enhance the facilities available for community connections.

Secure Grant Funding

Securing more grant funding would allow for the expansion of current projects and the development of new initiatives. A targeted approach, focusing on both public and private grants, could be developed. The support from grants could aid in the acceleration of projects like these recommendations by allowing funds to be allocated towards the development, equipment, and implementation of plans.

Implement GSI Aspects

With the implementation of more grant funding, GSI projects could take place. Incorporating GSI features, such as rain gardens, permeable paving, and bioswales, would not only improve the sustainability of the space but also offer educational opportunities for visitors. These features align with broader environmental goals and could attract interest from local environmental groups and students.

Impacts

Short-Term Impacts

As this green alley project continues to develop, the renderings we created as well as the responses from community surveying will be used for grant writing. Our project partner, Jay Meeks, has already begun the process of applying for funding to bring this project to life. Grant funding will be used for the installation of GSI, the installation of the community art piece, and repaving the alley.

The green arts alley—and the surrounding green spaces Indiana Street Garden and Huntington Street Park—can serve the community as space for community social events. This space is already being used for such events (such as community garden work days), and the community engagement plan we provided was used for summer programming (Juneteenth event, pollinator education event, ice cream social, etc.) The space will continue to be used for educational programming with the intention of building climate resilience in the Marygrove community.

As we did surveying of the community during town hall we hosted in April 2024, several responses to our questionnaires posed ideas for continued work outside of the alley space—such as additional trash/recycling receptacles, and rain collection gardens on several different street corners. Survey results we collected during our project (as well as results still actively being collected by MCA and the incoming Graham Scholars cohort) will inform the future of the development of the green alley and the surrounding space.

Long-Term Impacts

Many Marygrove residents have experience with basement flooding. In a practical sense, the installation of rain gardens as a means of GSI will reduce flooding and flooding damage in the community. This will also save taxpayer dollars on stormwater management and flood damage control, therefore saving Marygrove residents money in the long term.

By informing residents on how GSI can serve as a means of climate change mitigation, as well as engaging residents with an outdoor space, our hope is that this green alley will boost climate resilience in the Marygrove community. As the climate crisis continues to affect our communities, a green arts alley can provide a place for residents of the Marygrove community to find solidarity, resilience, and joy.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Jay and Rachel for guidance and support throughout this project, and for welcoming us into your community; your mentorship has been so impactful. Thanks to the rest of the MCA board for platforming this project and the conversations surrounding it, and to the residents of Marygrove for participating in sharing project input, stories, and more. For all of the joy and laughter, a huge thank you to Eleanor and Domino!

Thank you to community partners – at Live6 homebase, the Ecology Center Ann Arbor, and Patti of DBCFSN/Detroit People’s Food Co-op – for their support in our spring and summer programming.

Thank you to our interviewees – Paul Draus, Joshua Newell, and Palencia Mobley – for taking the time to meet with us and for sharing their knowledge and resources to support the direction of our project.

Lastly, thank you so much to Bridget and Lauren for supporting us throughout the Graham Sustainability Scholars program and facilitating this hands-on sustainability project opportunity.

Works Cited

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Appendices

Appendix A: Collages from the Town Hall Event



Appendix B: Drawing of the green alley with GSI and outdoor infrastructure elements



Appendix C:

