

# Community Garden report for 2025

## St. Anthony Park Community Gardens in 2025

The community council owns the land between Robbins Street and the first spur rail track from Raymond to Cromwell. In addition to the east end of the property used by Ettl and Franz, this piece of land includes three sections: the St. Anthony Park Community Garden, the St. Anthony Park Prairie Heritage Garden and the Native Plum Grove.

### 2025 Community Gardens

This year the large spring meeting was again held over Zoom. At this meeting gardeners are reminded of expectations for garden maintenance and for volunteering to help with common area tasks and have a chance to meet other gardeners with a plot near theirs. This year 92 plots were rented, with over 150 people involved in the gardens. We had more requests for plots than we were able to satisfy again this year. Many gardeners have commented on how valuable it has been to have the garden as a calm place to come during times of anxiety and stress.

We held monthly work days of two hours duration. Volunteers signed up at our spring meeting. Some people attended more than one. At the work days this year we worked more on the renovation of the native plum area, installed a new gate for the food shelf plots, cleared along the back fence and, the big, long-term project, creating a new area we are calling the Berry Orchard. This area is located between the gardens and the beginning of the railroad property. We are clearing it, planting a variety of berry producing shrubs and trees and building hugelcultures. This spring we planted 6 elderberry saplings and 5 serviceberry saplings, and this fall CEZ delivered and planted 6 large (6 to 8 feet) serviceberry trees.

We held a Sip and Stroll that was a big success! It was a lovely summer evening. One of the gardeners, a musician, volunteered to provide music along with a friend. The Community Council provided a tent roof shelter from the sun for the musicians and provided snacks and beverages. Many gardeners, friends of gardeners, council members and other guests came. Neighbors who happened to hear the music or see the activity came into the gardens and a very warm and congenial experience was shared amid the beauty of the gardens on a summer evening.

### Food Shelf

We had another great year supplying healthy food for the Seal Hi-Rise Sunday Table program. A solid group of 16 gardeners volunteered to water, weed and pick veggies, in partnership with the SAP Community Council Equity Committee members who delivered the goods to Seal. The food shelf plots at the East end of the garden produced 581 pounds; individual gardeners contributed a further 306 pounds from their own personal plots; resulting in a total of 887 pounds of fresh produce going to our neighbors at Seal.

### 2025 Prairie Heritage Garden

Until 2024 we had been working with Landbridge, a local ecological landscape business (Vandalia and University) to maintain and improve the Prairie Heritage Garden located at the west end of the property near the intersection of Robbins with Cromwell. That portion of the property is not suitable for vegetable gardens and has been planted with native grasses and flowers that were present in St. Anthony Park at the time of European settlement. Unfortunately, Landbridge raised their prices so much that it was impossible for us to continue to hire them. We are searching for another landscape business to help maintain the Prairie Heritage Garden in 2026. In 2025, not much was accomplished here except for cutting out sumac and a few trees. We have left a few oaks to grow. We hope to find a company that can do a burn and some spot spraying for us in 2026 at a cost we can afford. We also hope to build a small group of volunteers to learn about and maintain the area by regularly pulling invasives.

### 2025 Native Plum Grove

This is a small area behind the blacktop shared by the gardens and the city. The city welcomes our maintenance of it which, recently, has been negligent. Many years ago a small grant from Sunrise Bank helped us to buy native plum trees. For the last few years, sadly, we have not maintained the area adequately and a weedy thicket had developed. This year we made major intrusion into the space on a work day and cut out a lot of unnecessary vegetation. We have plans to prune what we saved this winter and to have improved maintenance. The continued use of work days will help with maintaining this area.

### **HOW DID THE COMMUNITY GARDENS GET HERE? WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR OPERATING IT?**

The community gardens were started in 1981 and grew out of a neighborhood leaf composting project of the Community Council on land owned by and rented from the railroad.

In 1999, when the railroad said they were going to sell the land for construction of a steel coil off-loading facility, the gardeners and Community Council responded by organizing a political effort to prevent the loss of the gardens and the construction of a disruptive use incompatible with the residential neighbors. This was truly an amazing “David and Goliath” effort helped by politicians. The final help was Bruce Vento, a Congressman from St. Paul, who was then serving on the Transportation Committee in Washington. The gardens provide a “green” buffer between the residences and the transportation corridors of railroad tracks, Energy Park Drive and Highway 280.

The Community Council and gardeners raised over \$150,000 to purchase the land, including over \$25,000 in individual contributions from neighborhood residents and businesses. The railroad finally agreed to sell the property to the Community Council in 2000.

An important part of the effort was an agreement with Ettel and Franz to allow them to continue parking on a portion of the property if they would support the neighborhood’s attempt to acquire it. They agreed and provided a large contribution that matched a STAR fund grant and got the fundraising started with some real chance of success. They have continued to be a good neighbor to the garden and have helped the gardeners with specific projects. Ettel and Franz added a storage building on the east end of the property in 2012 which they use. They were able to do this in a way that did not impact the gardens.

### **Management of the Land and Money**

As the owner of the land the Community Council is responsible for paying any costs associated with the property. **But** all expenses associated with the land are paid for out of garden plot rental fees and garden donations. Water, water system repair, fence and tree issues, tilling, printing, mailing...any expense associated with the land is paid for out of garden funds. Garden funds, maintained separately from council funds, are used for current garden operating expenses and as reserves for future needs of the gardens. The community gardens are a self-organizing project of the Community Council. Garden policies and management oversight are coordinated by a garden steering committee elected by the gardeners. Governance and policies are posted on the Community Council website. **All the tasks of managing and maintaining the gardens are done by volunteers.**

### **Property Taxes**

The portion of the property that is used by Ettel and Franz is taxed as industrial property, and Ettel and Franz pay these taxes. On the remainder of the property that is used for gardens, the property taxes have been abated. To qualify for a tax abatement, a non-profit must use the property to further its mission. The Community Council has promised that the gardens will provide fresh vegetables for benefit of a food shelf, resulting in not having to pay property taxes on the garden property. For several years, the fresh vegetables have gone to the Seal Hi-Rise public housing. All residents of Seal qualify for use of a food shelf, but not all are able to easily get to a food shelf. Having fresh vegetables delivered to their building has been a service to them. Three garden plots are set aside for vegetables to benefit Seal residents. Community gardeners and others in the community maintained the plots and harvested them. The SAPCC Equity Committee delivers the produce to Seal each Sunday during the gardening season.