

Community Analysis
for the
Charles L. Durham Library of the Free Library of Philadelphia
Urban and Community Gardening Collection

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Introduction

The Charles L. Durham Branch Library is a part of the Free Library of Philadelphia. Located in West Philadelphia just south of the Philadelphia Zoo, it serves the Mantua and Powelton neighborhoods. The Durham Branch is the second smallest library in the Free Library system and is located at 3320 Haverford Avenue, Philadelphia, PA (Shubik-Richards & Dowdall, 2012). URL: <http://libwww.freelibrary.org/branches/branch.cfm?loc=DUR>

The Durham branch shares the same mission as the Free Library of Philadelphia, to “advance literacy, guide learning, and inspire curiosity” (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2012a, 2012d). This mission is part of a broader vision to “build an enlightened community devoted to lifelong learning” (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2012d). The Free Library has set forth some goals in line with its current five year Strategic Plan. These goals include implementing and increasing the use of new technology, creating a balance among its physical and virtual presences, pursuing partnerships within the community, and increasing private support (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2012d). Durham library is committed to honoring this vision and these goals.

Situated on the corner of 34th and Haverford streets, the footprint of Durham library itself is rather small and shares its walls with the Mantua Recreation Center (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2012b). The library functions with only two major employees, a branch librarian and children’s librarian, and utilizes volunteers often.

Overall User Community Demographics

Durham library is located in the Mantua neighborhood, but services both the Mantua and Powelton neighborhoods of West Philadelphia and draws from these neighborhoods for its user community. While both neighborhoods are largely residential, Powelton borders Drexel University campus and Mantua borders the Philadelphia Zoo.

The following demographic information was obtained from City-Data.com. Statistics were obtained on the Mantua and Powelton combined neighborhoods as well as the Mantua neighborhood individually (City-Data, 2011a, 2011b). Total population for the combined area is 13,734 people with a nearly equal ratio of males to females. The median age for males is 23 years and 28 for females, and a majority of the residents in this overall area are between the ages of 18 and 27. As Drexel University is within close proximity, 34.6% of residents in the Durham branch area are undergraduate students. However, the Mantua neighborhood varies somewhat from this in that it has more children with 25.5% of the population at school age (K-12). In the combined neighborhoods, single populations dominate and 19% are single-mothers while in Mantua this percent jumps to 31.4%. Mantua and Powelton are multi-ethnic with over 50% African-American ethnicity, around 25% Caucasian, and 6% Asian ethnicity. Mantua is not as diverse with nearly 91% of the population of African American ethnicity. A majority of residents are native to Pennsylvania and over 98% speak English. Over 41% of the area lives below the poverty level with a median income of \$19,161. Nearly 60% of the population has a high school level education or less. The crime index for Mantua and Powelton, as determined by City-data.com, is more than double that of the national average.

Based on this demographic information, it is generally assumed that the user community for Durham is largely a single, young adult and children population mostly of African American

ethnicity. Though there is a large undergraduate student population in the area, it is assumed this population is largely serviced by its respective institution's academic library(s).

Subject Collection and its User Community

Subject Collection

The Charles L. Durham library proposes to develop a subject collection on urban and community gardening that coincides with the recent release of First Lady Michelle Obama's book, *American Grown: The Story of the White House Kitchen Garden and Gardens Across America*. This book not only offers readers a look at the implementation and growth of the public garden at the White House, but is generating conversation nationwide on how gardens and community gardens can serve as a learning platform for promoting healthy living among families and children (Amazon, 2012). In creating an urban and community garden collection, Durham library promotes its mission to guide learning and inspire curiosity. The purpose of the collection is to not only provide users information about gardening, but inspire them to think about healthy living and community development. Resources in the collection might cover topics such as general gardening practices, plants and vegetation capable of growing in the Philadelphia area, health benefits of gardening, garden design, urban gardening, civic information pertaining to starting a community garden, and/or non-profit involvement and cooperation in such efforts.

User Community

The urban and community garden subject collection has the potential to serve many populations. Its primary users will likely be community organizations, including leaders of the organization as well as members, and families, including parents and children. Its secondary users will likely be general interest gardeners.

Primary Users

The Mantua and Powelton neighborhoods have a strong community organization presence. Aside from the Mantua Recreation Center that shares its space, Durham library is surrounded by a number of community organizations with the potential to institute or help in an urban and/or community garden effort. There is also an established interest in community gardening by organizations in the area.

The library's own LEAP program, Literacy Enrichment After-school Program, serves K-12 students and is present at the library Monday through Thursday (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2012c). The Mantua Community Improvement Committee (MCIC) is dedicated to improving the overall quality of life for Mantua residents and has a number of programs and initiatives to serve its purpose, including a proposed youth program about healthy eating (Mantua Community Improvement Committee, 2012). The Summer Winter Community Garden, located in Powelton near Drexel University, is an established community garden in the library's user community (Summer Winter Community Garden, N.D.). The Pennsylvania Horticulture Society's City Harvest effort grows food for low income seniors and promotes the use of urban gardens for health initiatives (Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 2011). A number of education organizations are in the area including six elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, two preschools, and six day care facilities. Drexel University also has a presence in the community and recently with the cooperation of its Community Initiatives Office and students implemented a therapeutic garden for the seniors of the Mantua Presbyterian Apartments, which is incidentally across the street from the Durham library (McKechnie, 2012). The community also hosts eight religious organizations and a number of community and cultural centers (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2012c).

Another primary user group of this collection is families and children. A quarter of the population in Mantua is comprised of school age children and 31% are single mothers. The average family size is 3.5 people (City-Data, 2011b)

Secondary Users

The urban and community garden collection is likely to attract general interest gardeners, which will be the secondary users of the collection. Since this user group is formed from the general population in the Durham library area, its demographics will reflect the demographics of the community as a whole. The group is equal in males and females, tends toward a younger adult age, and speaks English (City-Data, 2011a)

In the event Durham library would need to obtain more information about the user community for its urban and community gardening collection, direct communication with key informants such as community organization officers and leaders can help identify specific interests (Evans & Saponaro, 2012, p. 57). As community gardening employs the use of outdoor space, engaging the “Looking Around” community analysis method may provide information about spaces, organizations, and interested parties in urban gardening (Consulting Librarians Group, Cooper, Bolt, Lance, & Webster, N.D.). A committee of library employees, board members, and even citizens can travel the area and report findings based on a specific timeline.

Parent Body

Free Library of Philadelphia

The Free Library of Philadelphia was chartered in 1891 and now has 54 locations throughout Philadelphia, with its central library at Parkway Central (Shubik-Richards & Dowdall, 2012). The Free Library’s mission and vision mirror that of the Durham branch. The five year strategic

plan, beginning with this year, revamped the mission to state “advance literacy, guide learning, and inspire curiosity” (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2012d). The plan also put forth some actions for which it intends to meet these mission goals. Among them are to implement and increase the use of new technology, create a balance among its physical and virtual presence, pursue partnerships within the community, and increase private support (Free Library of Philadelphia, 2012d). The governance structure of the Free Library of Philadelphia is cited as being “confusing” by the 2012 PEW Charitable Trusts' Philadelphia Research Initiative report. The study notes that one of the future goals of the Free Library is to simplify its governing structure (Shubik-Richards & Dowdall, 2012). However, currently there are two managing bodies, a city agency, run by its own board, and a non-profit foundation. The latter is mostly charged with finding funds for the library system. Most funding, two-thirds, comes from the city of Philadelphia, under 20% from the state of Pennsylvania, and 15 % from private sources (Shubik-Richards & Dowdall, 2012, pp. 20-21).

Mantua Neighborhood

The neighborhood of Mantua, the home of the Durham library, is ripe for revitalization. Following tumultuous times in the 1980s and 1990s where the area was infamous for drug crimes, murders, and gang violence, the area is now working toward a safer future (Mantua Community Improvement Committee, 2012). There are a number of vacant lots in the area, 700 were reported in the 2005 Mantua Community Plan (Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 2005). These lots can be used per the city’s Small Lot Abatement Program for yards, and general grounds improvement, making the community a prime audience for the urban and community gardening collection at the Durham library.

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