

PRESS RELEASE

Contact Information: Aziz Dehkan, NYCCGC Executive Director
phone: 973.222.5413; email: aziz@nyccgc.org

December 18th, 2016

**For Immediate Release from Aziz Dehkan, Executive Director,
New York City Community Garden Coalition (NYCCGC)**

WHAT: NYCCGC Releases the Gardens Rising Feasibility Study, Previews Implementation Phase

NYCCGC announces the release of the Lower East Side Community Gardens Green Infrastructure Feasibility Study on best practices to capture stormwater within community gardens. The study is available at bit.ly/gardensrising. The completion of the feasibility study concludes Phase I of the two-part Gardens Rising project.

The Feasibility Study examines the feasibility, costs, benefits, and impacts of proposed stormwater capture methods, which would increase permeability and green space in neighborhood gardens and would better absorb storm water runoff. It identifies locations where green infrastructure and stormwater capture systems can be implemented across the study area, giving priority to the water capture opportunities and preferences of the community gardeners.

The months-long process combined community participation with engineering expertise to develop a green infrastructure study and master plan. The Gardens Rising team assessed garden conditions, needs, and investigated custom solutions for 46 gardens on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Each garden's potential ecological benefits can be amplified within the context of a community garden district. The Feasibility Study considers common needs across the Lower East Side's gardens such as visibility, rodent abatement, and social resilience.

The design team, led by the New York-based landscape architecture firm WE Design, included eDesign Dynamics for engineering services, and 3x3 Design for community engagement. Gardens Rising is funded by the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery (GOSR) through a \$2 million community development block grant for storm recovery. The majority of the gardens are located within an area that was severely flooded during Superstorm Sandy, and many were impacted directly by the storm.

A Guide to the Feasibility Study

Project Overview: The Feasibility Study is a community-based approach to enhancing the sustainability and resiliency of community gardens around the Loisaida neighborhood. The intention of the study is to analyze the sites based on criteria from the New York Rising Community Reconstruction Planning Committee for enhanced resiliency and create a more

recognized community garden district identity. The project proposes strategies to improve water quality within gardens, treat stormwater runoff, address issues of water supply, enhance local habitat, and create sources for renewable energy.

Fieldwork: Fieldwork conducted in 46 of 47 Lower East Side community gardens included environmental analysis and sociological surveys.

Community Engagement: Iterative community engagement exercises helped refine and direct the fieldwork observations into a directed set of strategies. Our methods ensured that the strategy recommendations incorporated community knowledge, experience, and insight throughout the formulation of the final report. A crowd-sourced web platform allows gardeners to stay up-to-date with projects, learn about green infrastructure, and post resources or comments to the public forum.

Strategy Toolkit: The toolkit is a set of sustainability and resilience recommendations that have been synthesized from both the technical considerations identified during the fieldwork, and the expressed objectives of the community gardeners from the community engagement process. The strategy toolkit was created in response to repetitive conditions observed in the community gardens.

Garden Analysis: The toolkit is applied to each one of the community gardens based on each strategy's suitability for the conditions found at each site as well as any interest or disinterest in particular strategies that we heard from each garden at community meetings. Each community garden has proposed elements from the toolkit and an estimate of costs associated with the recommended strategies. Evaluation criteria will help determine how to allocate construction funds. The criteria encompass both technical improvement metrics and each garden's capacity to maintain and operate a given strategy.

"The study is a product of our talented design team, staff, partners, and participants who contributed to Gardens Rising," said Aziz Dehkan, NYCCGC Executive Director. "We had the ambition to create a replicable model connecting community members with design professionals to address ecological and social resiliency over time. The Feasibility Study is a practical guide for the implementation phase, but it is also a record of our community process itself."

GOSR Executive Director Lisa Bova-Hiatt said: "This is an ideal illustration of how Governor Cuomo's mandate to seek community input produces optimal results, as local residents best know their area's priorities. The feasibility study and the resulting designs and construction of neighborhood projects will result in greener and more resilient neighborhoods."

Future of the project

The Feasibility Study is intended to create clear directives for the design and construction of specific installations in the community gardens. Phase II of Gardens Rising will commence in early 2017 with \$1.5 million for the construction of green infrastructure projects selected from

among the recommended strategies. Upon the conclusion of Gardens Rising, the Feasibility Study will remain a resource for any further work that may be carried out independently by gardeners or other funded initiatives.

About Gardens Rising

The New York City Community Garden Coalition (NYCCGC) received a \$2,000,000 Community Development Block Grant in 2015 for Gardens Rising, a two-phase project to increase permeability and storm water capture within 47 neighborhood/ community gardens on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

About NYCCGC

Founded in 1996, New York City Community Garden Coalition promotes the preservation, creation, and empowerment of community gardens through education, advocacy, and grassroots organizing.

###