

POP-UP GROW!!

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To Help Meet Clean Water Goals, Baltimore's Innovative Community Events Build Goodwill As Much As They Promote Green Infrastructure

51

CLEAN WATER ADVOCATE Winter 2019



You may have heard of the “pop-up retailing” concept, where businesses of all kinds set up temporary locations—such as booths, stands, or display rooms—in (often surprising) locations like parks, train stations, and even street corners, to share their product’s unique experience with passersby. But have you heard of pop-up greening centers? We call them GROW

Centers, and they’re the newest pop-up trend that has taken hold in our city.

Baltimore is one of less than a handful of cities that have taken greening to pop-ups. The Baltimore City Department of Public Works

(DPW) is sponsoring the Greening Resources and Outreach for Watersheds (GROW) program, with the strategy to reach people where they are and make environmental education interesting to residents, whether or not they’re expecting to learn about taking care of their neighborhoods on that particular day.

These one-day environmental resource events are held on Saturdays, in neighborhoods and at retail locations that people visit to shop, to attend meetings, or, in some cases, just to pick up items for their own backyard projects. GROW Center pop-ups bring resources to where people are. They are a big hit, and they are multiplying. Mark Cameron, DPW’s Watershed Section Chief, jokingly commented that, nowadays, finding a GROW Center is almost like playing whack-a-mole.

Grow Center Timeline

Pop-ups
Spring - Fall
2019

**Business
Plan**
Spring -
Fall 2019

**Report
Evaluation**
June 2018

Consultant
Spring 2019

Spring Pop-ups
April 2018

**Research &
Partnerships**
Aug 2017
ongoing

**Planning &
RFP: Business
Plan**
Dec 2017

**USFS
Grant +
Peaceworker
Hire**
July 2017

**Pilot GROW
Center**
April 2016

RANDOM FOR A REASON

The agency promotes the centers in advance through news releases, social media, and direct community outreach. Locations vary such that a new audience is brought into the fold at each event. Residents find something new and different at a site they routinely visit for other reasons, perhaps to exercise, socialize, or play. Those caught unaware find out it is their lucky day as they watch, learn, and get to take home free greening items to create and add beauty to their own outdoor projects. These collaborative events pull together city agency and nonprofit resources to create an affordable and easily accessible event for residents throughout Baltimore.

The centers help the City achieve several environmental goals, including resident education,

as citizens learn and are inspired to accomplish greening projects that stabilize and beautify their own neighborhoods. These projects can include vacant lot revitalizations, tree plantings, and rain garden installation. Residents can get such items as seedlings, plants, and mulch; attend workshops; and talk directly with greening experts who are master gardeners or watershed

polluted runoff from private property. Improving neighborhoods, the environment, and the Chesapeake Bay are among the greatest benefits of GROW Centers.

The GROW Center concept follows a successful pilot greening program held for residents in 2016. Using a \$100,000 US Department of Agriculture/Forest Service Grant it received

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specialists. They can sit in on demonstrations on topics that include community organizing, making pollinator gardens, tree and orchard planting, farm-to-table cooking, and building of rain barrels. Free and low-cost green products are also made available.

UNITING THE CITY

Baltimore officials see an interconnectedness between four citywide initiatives. One is promoting a reuse economy to mitigate wood, food, and construction waste streams. Another is increasing the urban tree canopy from 27.4 percent to 40 percent, which is also in line with an initiative promoting the greening and revitalization of Baltimore's many vacant lots. GROW Centers also help the City achieve its Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) stormwater permit goals for reducing

in 2017, Baltimore DPW matched the funding and took up the greening project. This funding partly provided for the GROW Center pop-ups, as well as the creation of a feasibility study and business plan. Additionally, in the same year the grant was received, DPW was selected to receive a University of Maryland, Baltimore County Peacemaker Fellow. This fellow would be the





GROW Center Coordinator, tasked to further refine and test the GROW Center concept and organize “pop-ups.” These are inexpensive, temporary events that bring together partners and resources from city, federal, nonprofit, and community partners and allow the coordinator to test different delivery models and programs.

DPW hosted a total of eight GROW Center “pop-up” events in 2018. The spring events were held on four Saturdays from April 14 through May 5; the fall pop-ups were held on Saturdays from September 15 through October 13 and scheduled to run as part of existing community events. Program success was shown early on with the large number of participants at the Spring GROW Center events. The four spring 2018 GROW Center pop-ups were visited by 206 participants, representing 86 neighborhoods throughout four areas of Baltimore City. During the spring pop-ups, 110 trees and 10 cubic yards of mulch were distributed. In addition, over \$700 worth of native

plants were sold. Nine workshops on community greening and stormwater management were held where attendees were able to network with greening experts and meet their neighbors and other like-minded residents.

A typical GROW Center visit includes children playing or engaging in athletic activities. DPW staffs a kids’ table with coloring books and a cornhole game the city devised. While the kids are busy, the adults are able to network and take full advantage of Baltimore’s green scene. The city’s TreeBaltimore program provides free trees, and the Department of Recreation and Parks provides mulch from its Camp Small location in northwest Baltimore. Residents can take as much mulch as they need. At one event, a resident brought their municipal trash can, filled it with mulch, and used it to fill in the tree pits along the community’s sidewalks.

GALVANIZING COMMUNITIES

Participating environmental groups include Blue Water Baltimore and a cost-efficient green alternative to demolition called Details Deconstruction. GROW Center attendees in the community known as CARE (Caring Active Restoring Efforts) received special assistance with materials collection from “Mayor Trey,” a teenager whose nickname comes from his volunteer attitude and active neighborhood presence. The Baltimore Community Toolbank, a partner organization, provided tools and equipment for all the pop-up events.

BMORE Beautiful, a mayoral initiative that works on beautification efforts in communities by partnering with residents, was another partner. Attendees were able to sign up with BMORE Beautiful, making a pledge to keep their communities cleaner and greener. BMORE Beautiful works closely with neighborhoods to provide education, outreach, and other resources. Baltimore City DPW provided recycling information and offered its popular yellow recycling bins at discounted prices.

Travis Lageman, Baltimore's GROW Center Coordinator, notes that many participants have said they were "new greeners" who heard about this event and wanted to learn more. He's excited about the great impact of these promotional efforts. In his final Spring GROW Center report, Lageman writes that part of the program's success is likely due to the effectiveness of partner and DPW citywide promotions. Some events had a line of eager greeners waiting, even before DPW staff could get the GROW Center popped up.

GROW-ING THE FUTURE

Developing a GROW Center network based on this outreach is potentially invaluable, considering the abundance of "new greeners" the pop-ups attracted. Dispersing the GROW Center pop-up locations across Baltimore City afforded access to a large number of people and neighborhoods. Event promotion for the pop-ups was done throughout the city, with a particular focus on the neighborhoods around the pop-ups. DPW used press releases, social media, newsletters, flyers, lawn signs, community meetings, and cold calls to community leaders to promote the events.

Much useful data and insight will help design what a permanent Baltimore GROW program might resemble. Lageman's report concludes that programming could be targeted toward new community groups who have recently adopted vacant lots or are applying for grant funding. This would help ensure that GROW Center resources are used in community greening projects, like vacant lot revitalization, rather than in private homes, a concern gleaned from early experience and comments. Another lesson learned is that GROW Center users were more likely to attend the pop-up location closest to them. Targeted areas included those with less tree canopy, higher vacant lot percentages, and a higher number of community-managed open spaces.

Early results indicate that GROW Centers are a successful community outreach venture that benefits the city, the environment, and the residents. DPW is now gearing up to hold pop-ups in spring 2019. 💧

For detailed information on Baltimore's GROW Center, visit Baltimore City's website (<https://publicworks.baltimorecity.gov/>)

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