**Equity Toolkit for 10.4 - Develop and Promote Community Growing Spaces**

The town of Fairfield Parks and Recreation Department manages a community garden called Drew Park, located on municipal property at 220 Warde Terrace, that is accessible to any town resident. The plots are intended to be used for growing edible plants or flowers and growers are encouraged to use organic and sustainable practices. The aim is to offer a communal, recreational and learning experience through the exchange of horticultural knowledge with each other.

Fairfield’s Drew Park community garden is promoted via the [town website](https://www.fairfieldct.org/Drew-Park-Community-Garden), the Parks and Rec department program brochures, and the [Sustainable Fairfield website](https://sustainablefairfield.wordpress.com/2021/07/04/fairfields-community-of-gardeners/) maintained by the town’s Sustainable Fairfield Task Force (SFTF). SFTF also promoted the website post about community gardens across its social media platforms (Facebook and Instagram).

<https://www.fairfieldct.org/Drew-Park-Community-Garden> (photos of the garden available at the link)

<https://sustainablefairfield.wordpress.com/2021/07/04/fairfields-community-of-gardeners/>

In addition to the municipal community garden at Drew Park, there are a number of other community gardens available to Fairfielders for enjoyment, volunteerism, education or nourishment. These gardens are located on private land, or church or school grounds. The Sustainable Fairfield website maintains a list of these community gardens, the produce of which are typically donated to local food pantries, here:

<https://sustainablefairfield.wordpress.com/2021/07/05/grow-a-row-of-hope-community-gardens-in-fairfield/>

**2021 Sustainable CT Action 1.1 - Optimize for Equity**

According to data provided by Feeding America (<https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2018/overall/connecticut/county/fairfield>), Fairfield County has a 9.9% rate of food insecurity. There are 93,270 people in the county who suffer from food insecurity. Food insecurity is described as a lack of access to enough food for a healthy life. Food insecurity may force a family to trade-off between necessary expenses, such as housing, food and medical bills.

In the spring of 2020, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, Fairfield resident and Representative Town Meeting member, Sharon Pistilli, connected with Michelle McCabe, Director of The Center for Food Equity and Economic Development of The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport, Inc. The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport, Inc. has been working in the region for the past 45 years, addressing food insecurity and food access throughout its 75-year history. Director McCabe has been with the organization for almost eight years. Among her responsibilities, McCabe facilitates the Hunger Outreach Network, a consortium of over 25 independent food pantries and community meal programs. McCabe has supplied food, conducted research, and implemented programs with food pantry patrons. Through these interactions, it was clear that patrons of food pantries desired fresh produce rather than canned goods, sought variety and quality, and had the knowledge to prepare them. The challenge for food pantry patrons is accessibility and affordability. When Pistilli connected with McCabe the idea that a cadre of gardeners could offer produce fresh from the garden to local food pantries would be the ticket to fulfilling this request that had long gone unanswered.

McCabe connected Pistilli with a Board Member of The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport who had a plot of land that could be used for the garden. Pistilli gathered a network of volunteers to tend the plot. Pistilli then worked with local food pantries- Operation Hope in Fairfield, nOURish and Fridgeport in Bridgeport, to ensure the food was distributed to individuals in need. The group donated 60-70 boxes of produce last year. The garden is on track to deliver a similar amount this year after receiving a donation of seeds from Ocean State Job Lot via the UConn Extension System and their Master Gardener program, as well as donations from the community via the Fairfield Shares Facebook group.

Along with this fabulous garden plot there is a longstanding Fairfield initiative, “Grow a Row for Hope” that all gardeners are encouraged to participate in on their private property. [Operation Hope](https://operationhopect.org/) has been in the Fairfield Community for 35 years helping the homeless and families in crisis and operating a food bank. Every summer they encourage local citizens that have a garden to put in an extra row and bring that extra produce to their food pantry so that their participants can have garden-fresh produce. Several churches in Town also have long-standing gardens that donate garden-fresh produce to the OpHope food pantry, e.g., St. Timothy’s Giving Garden, First Church of Fairfield and Our Savior’s Lutheran Church.