

Draft: Helensview community garden

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Executive summary

We have an opportunity to site a community garden in the school yard at Helensview High School, located at 8678 NE Sumner Street in NE Portland. The site is owned by Parkrose School District (PSD) and leased by the Multnomah Educational Service District (MESD).

This project is being pursued by the Sumner Association of Neighbors (SAN). Sumner neighborhood includes Helensview site, but otherwise lacks either a neighborhood school or a neighborhood park. Developing the school yard in this way would improve the neighborhood, provide a great instructional opportunity, and bring the school and the neighborhood closer together.

This project has the support of the principal of Helensview High School, and has received preliminary guidance from Commissioner Nick Fish's office and the Community Garden program at the city of Portland, and PSD superintendent Dr. Karen Gray.

Once up and running the garden would be run by Portland's Community Garden program. Necessary construction funding is TBD, but no funding will be sought from either PSD or MESD school district.

Goal for this draft (version 3)

Define parameters and a concept plan for improvement of the school yard at Helensview High School to include community garden.

This draft also includes preliminary details about timelines, construction elements, funding sources, and open issues.

With the success of this project, it could lead to other improvements of the school yard into a 'Helensview Park.' Other possible improvements for a 'Helensview Park' site:

- Playground
- Bathroom
- Picnic tables
- Walking loop

About the Helensview schoolyard site

This 11-acre site ([PortlandMaps](#)) at 8678 NE Sumner St is the former Sumner Elementary school built by the Parkrose School District in 1960. In 1996, the vacant school was leased to the Multnomah Education Service District (MESD). Helensview High School is run by Principal Kris Persson for the Multnomah Educational Services District (MESD). The school is for at-risk teens from all over Multnomah County. It is not a neighborhood school.

The building and the 11-acre property are leased by MESD from Parkrose School District under a 10-year lease up for renewal in 2012. Any community garden improvements – or other park amenities -- at the site require support of both agencies and our onsite principal.

Similar schoolyards – or adjacent property – have been established as Portland Parks and/or community gardens at other nearby elementary schools in the Portland Publish School District, such as Harvey Scott and Rigler.

The school itself sits on the south end of the site. Parking lots are located on east side of the property. At the northeast corner of the property are a covered basketball court and a ball field. The open school yard lies on the west and north sections of the site. All access is from NE 87th Avenue to the east.

About Sumner neighborhood

Sumner neighborhood ([website](#) – [map](#)) is located in NE Portland where Sandy Boulevard crosses I-205. The residential area mostly bounded by four busy arterials: NE 82nd Ave and I-205, Sandy Blvd and Killingsworth. There is no park and no neighborhood school within Sumner neighborhood to serve as a focal point for neighborhood identity and community activity.

To determine neighborhood priorities, a survey was conducted by and among Sumner residents in the summer and fall of 2009. Volunteers knocked on 800 doors to hand out the survey & received over 100 responses. The [survey results](#) (44K PDF) determined that “parks and green spaces” was the top item residents said Sumner neighborhood needed more of.

Size, scope and location of a Helensview community garden

As mentioned, all access and parking at the Helensview site is from the east side of the property adjoining NE 87th Avenue. The large vacant schoolyard occupies approximately the northern half and western third of the 11-acre Helensview site.

Per the tax map on [PortlandMaps](#), the full property is 640 feet (east to west) by 680 feet (north to south). Therefore the NW quadrant of the Helensview site would be an available area of 320 by 340 – a very large space – much more than Sumner neighborhood alone could reasonably hope to use as a garden.

Based on preliminary discussion with Helensview principal Kris Persson, the most likely location for the garden would be in this northwest section of the school property away from the school building. Gardeners will be entering from NE 87th, some parking vehicles in the lot. From the NW corner of the parking lot, the garden would be connected from the street and parking lot by a straight westbound path. This location is visible from the street and will also allow us to maintain a clear separation of school property and public access to the garden during school hours.

Based on a few assumptions -- from prior experience as a board member at the 2-acre [Picardo P-Patch](#) in Seattle -- here is an estimate of garden sizes and two starter layouts for a Helensview community garden.

- **Plot sizes:** 10' x 10' and 10' x 20' were the most common plot sizes, and create the most opportunities for gardeners. However, based on input from Laura Niemi, coordinator of the Community Garden program for Portland Parks and Recreation (PP&R), we will tilt toward the 10'x20' plot size as the standard for Portland community gardens.
- **Number of plots:** As a starting point, let's 50 plots total, 25 plots of each size: 10' x 10' and 10' x 20', arranged in blocks of 20' x 30' or 30' x 30'. Paths between the blocks are 3' wide – enough to allow a wheelbarrow.
- **Total garden area:** As a starting point, 7,500 square feet (100' x 75') has been OKed by Dr. Karen Gray at Parkrose School District (PSD).
However, Laura Niemi advised that a garden of 10,000 square feet or larger is the norm in the Portland Community Garden system and that, for cost effectiveness and community building reasons, she encouraged us to think larger. If a larger footprint is needed to secure funding, Dr. Gray has given a preliminary OK to do so.
Please note: Extra area is needed for paths, a toolshed, water spigots and compost bins. So 75' by 100' results in a total footprint of 80'x 115'.
- **Plots set aside for Helensview educational purpose:** As a starting point, set aside an area at the south side of the garden for Helensview students. Based on the width of the garden, this could be as small as 10' x 50' or as large as 20' x 100'.

Required elements for a Helensview community garden

The following elements would be installed or built for a basic community garden:

- Water pipes and spigots
- Fencing
- Paved path from parking lot
- Compost bins
- Tool shed with lock
- Tools (such as wheelbarrows, rakes and shovels)
- Bark chips for garden paths

Preliminary concept: Construction and management of a Helensview community garden

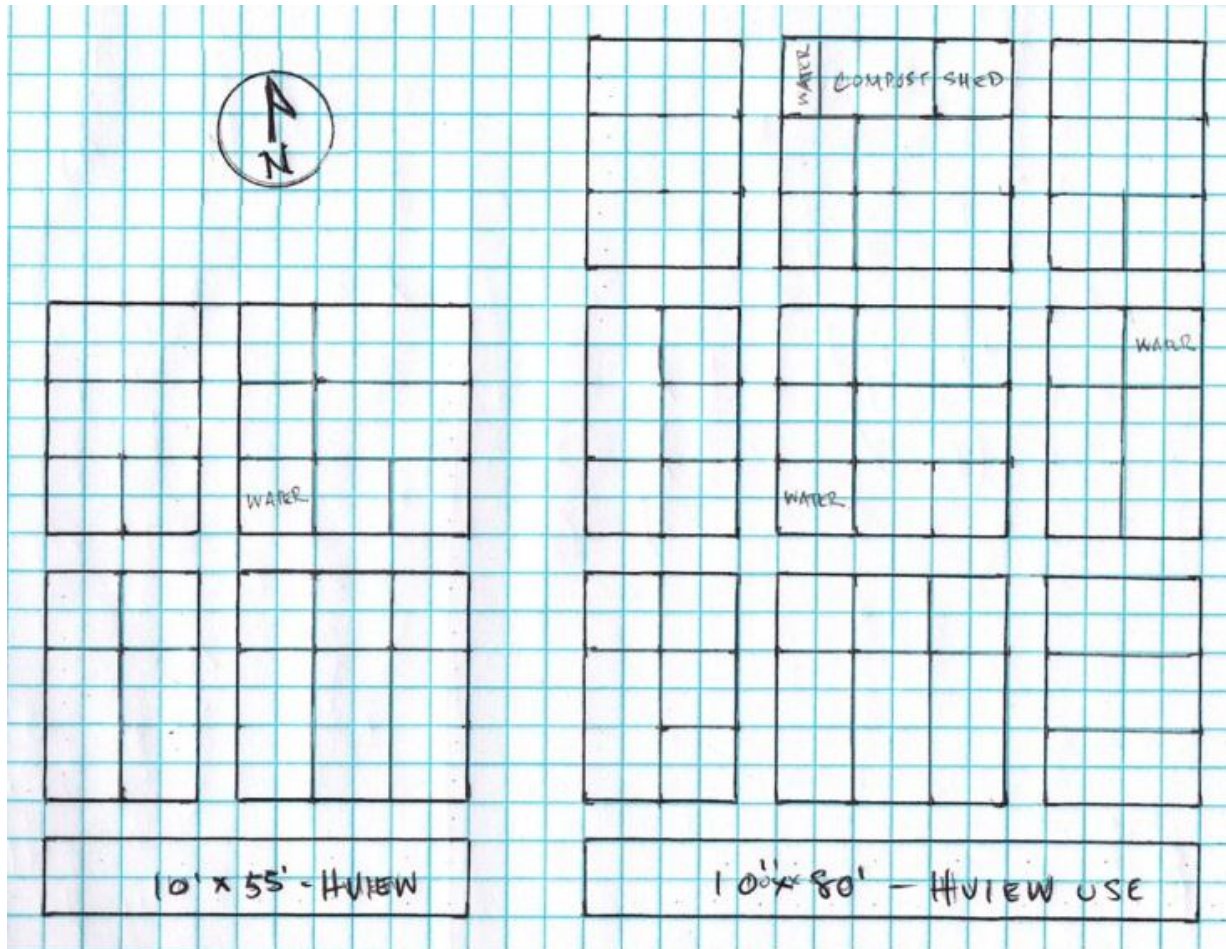
Based only the initial talks with each Kris Persson (Helensview principal), Sandra LeFrancois (Central Northeast Neighbors Garden.Net), Dr. Karen Gray (PSD), Laura Niemi (PP&R Community Garden program), here is an outline:

- The community garden property would be leased by PP&R from PSD or sub-leased from MESD/Helensview under a 5-year lease agreement.
- Funding of the project would be driven by the Helensview Community Garden steering committee defined later in this plan, with substantial guidance from the groups and agencies listed in the 'Resources' section later in this plan.
- Construction of the project would be led by someone other than PSD (presumably PP&R, but this is not yet confirmed)
- Operation and management of the community garden would be performed by PP&R Community Garden program.
- Operation of Helensview instructional garden would be led and managed by Helensview staff under a partnership agreement with PP&R Community Gardens.

Example layouts of a community garden

Here are two basic layouts just for a sense of scope. The second layout is the 7,500 square foot example that is under consideration:

- **The first is 55' x 80'**, including 10' x 55' for Helensview use and 20 other total plots. It includes water spigots but doesn't include a toolshed or compost bins yet.
- **The second is 80' x 115'**, supplementing the first, including 10' x 80' for Helensview use and 38 other total plots. It includes a toolshed, water spigots and compost bins.



Example # 1

Total area: 80' x 55'
 11 plots @ 10' x 10'
 9 plots @ 10' x 20'

Example # 2

Total area: 115' x 80'
 19 plots @ 10' x 10'
 19 plots @ 10' x 20'

Example site placement of a community garden

The following image shows the approximate relative size of an 80' x 115' garden (white rectangle).



Discussion with Kris Persson, principal of Helensview

Helensview High School is run by Principal Kris Persson for the Multnomah Educational Services District (MESD). The building (but not the whole property) is leased by MESD from Parkrose School District under a 10-year lease. Any improvements at the site require support of both agencies and our onsite principal.

First step: Walk the property with Kris to obtain her must haves, nice-to-haves, and must not haves for any improvements – and for initial placement of the community garden.

Item or issue	Must/must not have	Comment
Safety	Must	Student safety is a top priority. However, Gardeners need access during daylight hours (including school hours). Need ways to maintain clear boundaries of active school grounds from garden area (or even a school/public delineation within the garden).
Parking	Must not	Inner parking lot is never used for vehicles. Outer parking lot needs to be reserved for students and guests during school hours. School hours now stretch from 7:30 AM to 8:30 PM. Might be some wiggle room...perhaps set aside 5 spots for gardeners. Still a goodly walk to the back of the schoolyard.
Animals	Must not	Prefer no access before 5 PM
Restroom	Must not	No building access
Access to garden	Must	School yard is only accessible via parking lot area adjacent to NE 87 th Ave. The other three sides of the school yard are bordered by a fence. For low mobility gardeners, a smooth path is most desirable.
Water		Pipes are needed to connect from school to garden area. Installation cost needs to be minimized via grants. Water costs are defrayed by community garden fees and H'view portion is negotiable, because the garden will be partially used by students.
Siting		Large school yard, however MESD only leases the building. Size and location of garden TBD.

Discussion with Dr. Karen Gray, superintendent of Parkrose School District (PSD), and Mary Larson, business manager of PSD

The 11-acre Helensview High School site is leased by MESD from Parkrose School District under a 10-year lease set for renewal in 2012. Any improvements at the site require support of both agencies and our onsite principal, Kris Persson.

On 18 October 2011, Scott Somohano of Sumner Association of Neighbors (SAN) met with Dr. Karen Gray and Mary Larson, superintendent and business manager of PSD, respectively, to gather their must haves, nice-to-haves, and must not haves for any community garden project at Helensview.

Item or issue	Must/must not have	Comment
Water meter	Must	PSD cannot bear the cost of meter installation or water.
Project funding	Must not	PSD lacks funds for this project
Project management	Must not	PSD has numerous other construction projects on its plate at this time
Site management	Must not	PSD does not have the means to manage a community garden
Manpower	Must not	PSD does not have the manpower to devote to this project
Liability		Any contract or leasing arrangement needs to remove PSD from liability by placing insurance liability with the lessee.

Defining a steering committee for Helensview community garden and related agencies and resources

A steering committee of neighborhood residents, businesses and the most closely related agencies will be formed to guide the direction, grant writing and scope of the Helensview community garden project.

Helensview High School, as the site host, and the Parkrose School District, as the property owner, need to have seats on the direct steering committee. Here is the draft composition of this group.

Stakeholder	Representative	Relation to the project
Helensview HS	Kris Persson or designee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaser of the Helensview building Interested in garden as potential student curriculum
Parkrose School District	Mary Larson or designee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Owner of school and site If things work out, our community garden overlord 😊
Sumner Association of Neighbors (SAN)	Colin Lambarth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neighborhood location of Helensview Identified by Portland Plan and self-identified as being in need of ‘park and green space’ opportunities Colin is the SAN board member overseeing parks and open space
Business in Sumner neighborhood	Schetkey NW Sales or Broadway Cab	Schetkey NW Sales adjoins the west property line at Helensview, and would be an obvious choice – if they have the interest.
Sumner neighborhood	Erica Martin	Secretary for the SAN board. Also heavily involved in Russell Academy PTA.
Sumner neighborhood	TBD	
Sumner neighborhood	TBD	

In addition to a steering committee, several important agencies hold valuable information and resources that are essential for seeing this project through to completion.

Stakeholder	Representative	Relation to the project
Portland Parks Community Garden program	Laura Niemi or designee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agency with expertise and models. Might take over management of a community garden after it’s built.
Central Northeast Neighbors GardenNet program	Sandra LeFrancois or designee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neighborhood coalition group with gardening focus Two-year track record of ‘connecting dots’ on exactly this type of project in our part of Portland.
Nick Fish’s 1000 Garden program	Emily Hicks or designee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding source, obstacle removal, and guidance toward essential expertise and resources
Friends of Community Gardens	Lora Price or designee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant coordinators for 1,000 Gardens program

Preliminary timeline for Helensview community garden project

This is a very preliminary first stab at a timeline for planning, funding and construction of a Helensview community garden. Please note: This has not been sanity checked yet!! 😊

Did I mention that it was preliminary?

Task	Duration	Description
Scoping and finalizing framework	Three months: November 2011 – January 2012	Three to five meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nailing down the concept plan (addressing open issues) • Confirming costs (incl construction permits) • Identifying funding and grant sources
Grant writing	Three months: February – April 2012	Steering committee teams to complete: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performing soil tests • Writing grants • Confirming costs • Lining up contractors or volunteer groups to perform construction
Construction	Three months: May – July 2012	Hopefully this timeline will not disrupt classwork at Helensview: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend water pipe and install water meter • Pour and lay path • Till soil and bring in more top soil as needed • Install spigots • Construct fence • Build compost bins • Place shed

Open issues

Several issues need to be resolved:

- **Leasing** – The 10 year lease between MESD and PSD, which renews in 2012, includes the schoolyard. Any leasing of property for a community garden must take this lease into account.
- **Construction** – A lead agency or group for construction of a Helensview community garden has not been confirmed. For now, this plan assumes the PP&R Community Garden program would oversee the garden’s construction – but that is NOT confirmed.
- **Student instructional section of the garden** – Top concern is for student safety. Opinions to date have differed about whether instructional purposes would benefit from commingling students with the public gardeners. TBD by Helensview staff in discussion with the steering committee and PP&R.