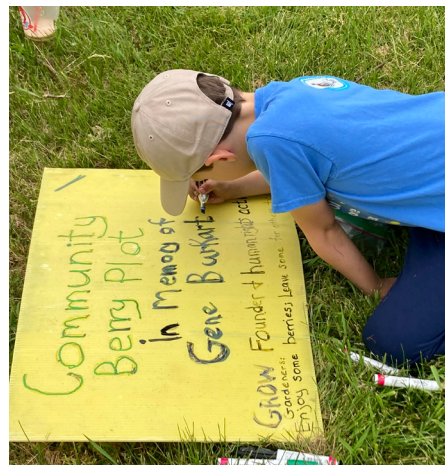


GREEN ROWS OF WALTHAM

2024

Annual report to the City of Waltham



December 2024

Hello Friends,

Thanks to the City of Waltham's generous purchase of 240 Beaver Street and offer of a license to continue using the land that we have organically gardened for the past 30 years, Green Rows of Waltham, Inc. has had an exciting and productive year! On January 3, 2024 this volunteer-run organization was granted 501(c)(3) status by the IRS. Six weeks after receiving this notification we signed our first one-year license with the City of Waltham. There were several provisions in this new license that GROW, Inc. had not before encountered. I am proud to say that gardeners stepped up to meet all of them! At our spring workday the board of directors brainstormed with gardeners about our approach. The energy and enthusiasm at that meeting were palpable. The board identified several gardeners who offered the needed skills and experience and met with them throughout the season. Not only did this process enable us to satisfy the license requirements, it allowed GROW, Inc. to develop layers of leadership and build a stronger community.

I hope you enjoy this report written and designed by volunteer gardeners. In it, you'll find the answers to License Item 23, which states that the licensee shall be required to demonstrate in writing how the inhabitants of the City of Waltham are benefited by the Licensee's use of the Land. The Licensee will be required to file an annual report due by December 15, 2024 with the City's Purchasing Agent detailing how much food was produced, where the food was donated and/or to whom the food was sold, traded, or bartered, and identifying any entity that has an interest in the crops or food sold or given from the Licensed Land.

Through information and quotes gleaned in a Fall 2024 survey of GROW gardeners and pictures taken throughout the 2024 gardening season, you'll have an opportunity to "meet" our gardeners, learn how they measure the success of their gardens, read about the strength of the GROW gardening community, and understand GROW's contributions to the Waltham community.

We look forward to offering many more years of community building and organic gardening to the citizens of Waltham!

Sincerely,

Katharine L. Randel
President, GROW, Inc.

BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY GARDENS

TUCKING A LITTLE SEED INTO THE SOIL IN EARLY SPRING, it's hard to imagine that it will become a sprawling, productive plant come mid-summer. Yet this is the magic that gardeners experience every year at Green Rows of Waltham (GROW). Every season starts with careful planning and plenty of hope, and the reward for nurturing seedlings for months comes when your garden basket is overflowing with food you grew yourself—fresh peas, plump tomatoes, too many zucchini to count, bright zinnias—and then being able to share that bounty.

Having a community garden in town is enriching on multiple levels for residents. On a social level, community gardens serve as vibrant hubs that foster social cohesion and community engagement, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds and age groups who might otherwise never meet. This helps strengthen social ties and create a sense of home in the community. Many gardeners say that their plot provides a beautiful refuge amidst urban hustle and bustle, reducing stress and enhancing overall well-being. Gardeners, especially those who garden with children, learn essential skills about growing food sustainably, cooking and enjoying vegetables, and connecting with nature.

In addition to the joy of growing your own food, gardeners are helping reduce the community's dependency on store-brought produce, which often is transported hundreds or thousands of miles to the store and contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. Gardens



“Our plants grew!! We did it ourselves!”

“It’s so amazing to have this opportunity to have good space to garden in the city, particularly since it’s not an option at my apartment.”

“I love that I can grow vegetables and spend time with my kids.”

GROW gardeners

also promote biodiversity by introducing a variety of plants that attract different pollinators, enhancing the ecological balance in urban areas and providing a much-needed food source for declining and important pollinator populations. And organic gardens, like GROW, help keep the soil productive and our residents healthy.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GREEN ROWS OF WALTHAM (GROW)

GROW celebrated important milestones in 2024:

- We celebrated our 30th growing season!

In the fall of 1993, a small group of volunteers received permission from the University of Massachusetts to use a portion of their land at 240 Beaver Street to create a community garden. Ground was broken for 34 plots to be tended by local residents, on land that has been used solely for agricultural purposes for more than 100 years.

Over the past 30 years, GROW has nurtured that soil and has evolved to 152 plots worked by 117 families, the majority of whom live in Waltham. Since our founding, our mission has been to bring the benefits of community gardening to Waltham: creating a community for our residents; enhancing peoples' participation with and appreciation of the land and soil; teaching and learning about food, gardening, and nutrition; providing access to organic food; and giving sustenance for the body and spirit. Through gardening here participants build a direct and deep connection with food, the land, and each other. Their connection to Waltham is deepened; and hence, a more committed citizenry results.

- The GROW board applied for and was granted 501(c)(3) status by the IRS, as a step toward sustainability into the future.
- We are happy to have signed our first one-year license with the City of Waltham, and to have modified some of our policies and procedures to accommodate the requirements.

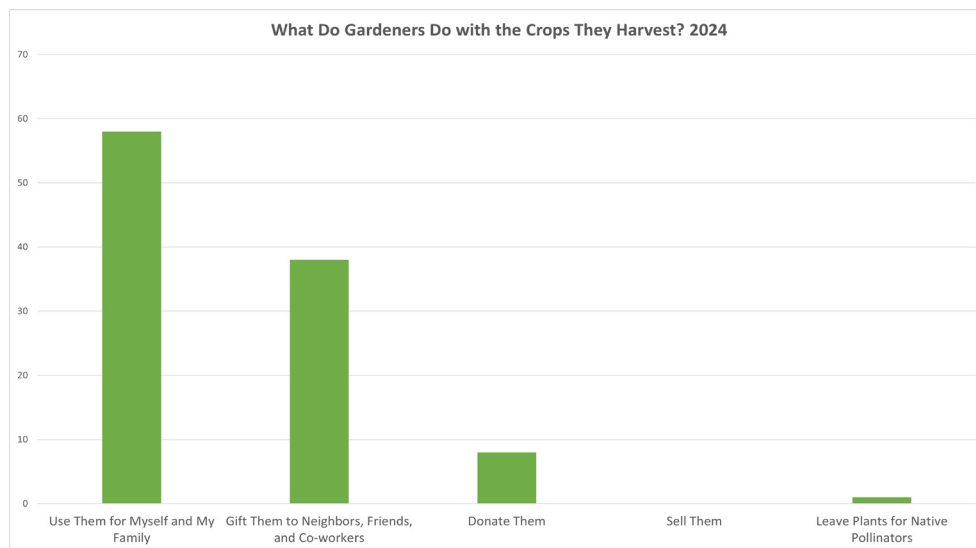
“I love that GROW provides access to outdoor space for gardening—I don’t have a yard or garden at my condo.”

“The space is unparalleled—excellent soil, sun exposure and water available. The gardeners are friendly and represent a huge array of gardening styles and traditions, spanning the US and the globe. I like seeing what others are doing and growing.”

“I’m most proud that I can make an entire meal out of just the food I’ve grown!”

GROW gardeners

What do our gardeners grow and how do they use it?



From a survey of this year's gardeners, 94% of survey respondents use their crops for themselves and their family, with 61% of them also sharing their harvest with neighbors, friends, and coworkers. Eleven percent of respondents also donate their crops.

We are not aware of gardeners who sell, trade, or barter their food.

This summer two of our gardeners piloted a donation event concurrent with our annual summer picnic. In August 2024 they collected 51 pantry items and 7 pounds of fresh, organic produce and donated it to the Salvation Army on 33 Myrtle Street, Waltham for their Food and Nutrition Program. GROW gardeners have expressed an interest in helping in our small way to alleviate food insecurity in Waltham, and we look forward to continued programs of this nature in future growing seasons.



Donation table in progress

In the survey we asked whether gardeners tracked the amount of food they grew. Sixty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they did not quantify their crops. Several provided estimates which ranged from 12-85 pounds grown with an average of 45 pounds/plot. Others reported canning 30 pints of tomatoes and harvesting 200 tomatoes, 6 cabbages, 2 buckets of potatoes, and 300 heads of garlic. While the bulk of gardeners use their produce to feed their families, 61%



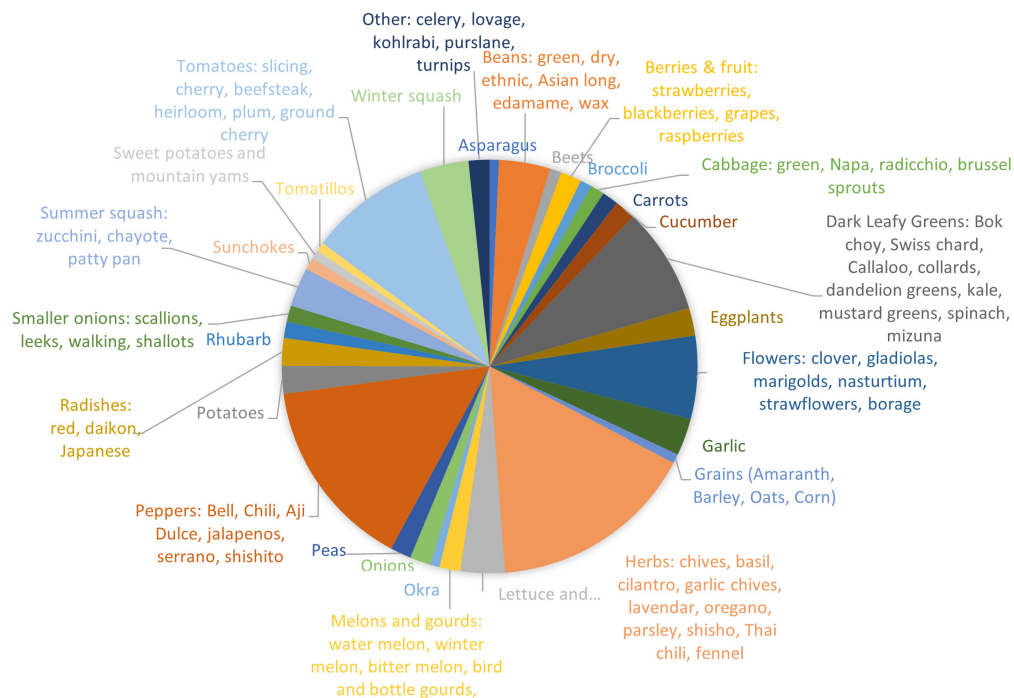
“I love the community! I have learned so much from other gardeners. I enjoy having others to chat with while I do chores. I love watching my own garden, but also everyone else's, grow and change throughout the season. I love that my son is connected to food sources and nature.”

GROW gardener

share their harvest with neighbors, friends, and co-workers. One illustrative comment from several gardeners indicated that their harvests meant that they didn't have to buy organic vegetables from the grocery store. For some this benefit lasted all winter long. This represents a substantial financial and health benefit to Waltham GROW gardeners. There are ecological benefits for the city as a whole as well. Less trucks driving through Waltham streets to deliver produce to stores or people's homes means there is less air and noise pollution, less traffic, and less wear and tear on the roads.

We also asked gardeners what they grew. The variety is truly astonishing.

GROW, INC. PRODUCE 2024



“I love that I can reduce my grocery bill especially when I wasn't working due to medical reasons.”

GROW gardener



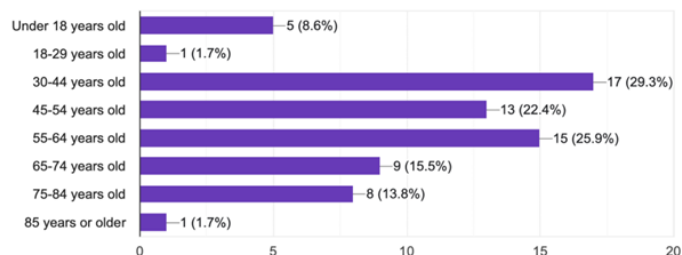
WHO ARE GROW GARDENERS?

GROW gardeners are a diverse, intergenerational community. The organization includes gardeners from under 18 (with parental supervision) to 85 years or older. Fifty-two percent of survey respondents garden with their partner or spouse, 23% with their children, and 3% with their parents.

While the majority of GROW's members who responded to our survey are Caucasians born in the United States, 25% of our gardeners responded that they hail from countries around the globe, including:

- UK
- Italy
- China
- Nepal
- Turkey
- Colombia
- Dominican Republic
- Trinidad and Tobago
- Bulgaria

Your age range and age range of all with whom you garden
58 responses



Twenty percent of gardeners responding to the survey identify as Asian or Pacific Islander, 4% as Hispanic, and 2% Black or African American.

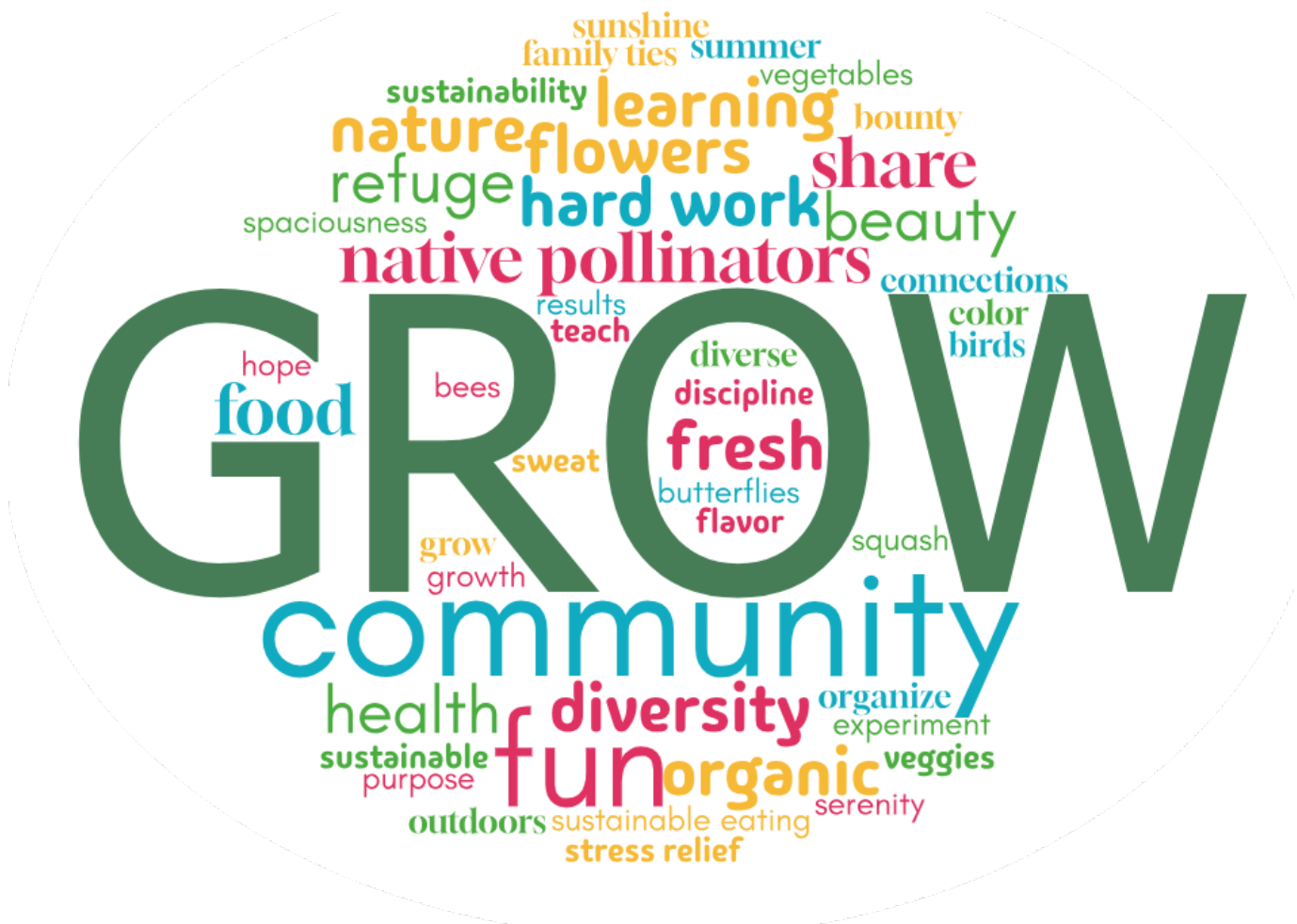
“The plot was originally owned by my son, Joe. I took it over in his memory after he passed away. I feel his presence in the garden that he loved so much.”

GROW gardener

BUILDING COMMUNITY IN WALTHAM AT GROW

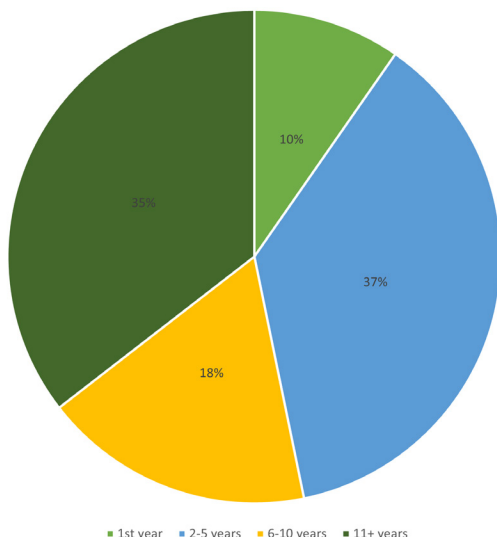
Every time that gardeners come to GROW to work on their plots, there's an opportunity for talking with and learning from other gardeners. As an organization, we also create social occasions, work teams, and work days that both get essential work done and build a stronger sense of community. Relationships are built across intergenerational, economic, ethnic and racial lines. These relationships strengthen social ties and create a sense of belonging in, and engagement with Waltham.

This year's annual summer potluck was organized by two new gardeners who spearheaded the organic produce and canned goods donation effort detailed elsewhere in this report. They also asked gardeners to submit an index card with three words that reflected GROW's most important value to them. They input those words to a word cloud generator, which varies the size of the text based on the frequency with which the word is mentioned. As you can see, GROW means many things to many people, but community is one of the most important assets submitted.



As you can see from the chart below, survey respondents were split almost equally between people who had been gardening for five years or less and those gardening for more than that, including 35% who have gardened more than eleven years. This mix of new and seasoned gardeners contributes to a strong sense of community. Returning, seasoned gardeners provide stability, experience, and leadership. New gardeners are welcomed at our garden orientation in the spring, and provide both new perspectives and energy to our GROW community.

Years GROW Members Have Been Gardening as of 2024



“I love meeting people from all over Waltham and learning about gardening from them. Having my garden plot has made me feel part of the Waltham community and allowed me to live my gardening dreams, and without it, we probably would have moved out of town by now.”

GROW gardener

WORKING TOGETHER, BUILDING COMMUNITY

GROW, Inc. is entirely volunteer run. In May 2024 thirty-seven gardeners readied the garden for the upcoming season, discussed the conditions of the new license and non-profit status, and brainstormed ways to meet new and ongoing responsibilities. These activities introduced new gardeners to each other, provided opportunities for conversation between gardeners who might not otherwise know each other, and overall strengthened relationships between gardeners.

Dismantling open compost piles: GROW discontinued use of our community compost pile and held three additional work days to remove the piles and prepare the soil underneath for alternative

use(s) next season. This was a major undertaking. Thirty-three volunteers dug, chopped, bagged, and hauled yard waste during these work days for an estimated time of 150 hours over the summer. After tilling the remaining soil we covered it with plastic to kill any remaining seeds. Delicious chocolate zucchini cake made by one of the organizers added joy and energy to the often physically demanding work!

Increased mowing: The area surrounding the gardens was previously mowed by the landlords. To maintain the appearance of the garden, our mowing team added mowing the outside perimeters of the gardens to their usual mowing of the aisles between the plots. A team of eleven gardeners contributed approximately 80 hours to keep the grass trim throughout the season.

Rat control: Four gardeners monitored, emptied, and replenished rat traps throughout the growing season. This work was usually done while gardeners were already at the garden, thus amounted to about 20 hours of volunteer effort over the course of the season.

Monitoring Plots: In an effort to improve the appearance and use of available plots, the GROW board increased the number of plot inspections during the season and followed up with more gardeners to discuss their situations and suggest ways to improve the conditions of their gardens. Some gardeners cleaned up their plots, some opted to move to smaller plots, and some chose to leave the garden. This enabled GROW to offer plots to gardeners on the waiting list, without charge for the 2024 growing season thus allowing them to clean up the overgrown plot and prepare the soil for next spring's planting.

Creating this Report: Special thanks to the volunteer annual report team who conceived of and built the wordcloud, and designed and implemented the graphics for this report, as well as the amazing photographers among our gardeners!



BENEFITS TO OTHER WALTHAM CITIZENS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Anecdotally, we know that Waltham residents walk through GROW gardens to enjoy the peacefulness and beauty of the gardens and the opportunity to chat with gardeners. “Urban green spaces provide environmental benefits through their effects on negating urban heat, offsetting greenhouse gas emissions, and attenuating storm water. They also have direct health benefits by providing urban residents spaces for physical activity and social interaction, and allowing psychological restoration to take place.”¹

“One thing that is very enjoyable is meeting new folks that come by to see the gardens out of curiosity or because they are interested in gardening.”

GROW gardener

Each year, the GROW board receives requests from organized groups for visits. In February 2024, a group of Brandeis students in an Eco-Writing creative workshop visited the GROW site, along with their instructor, Professor Elizabeth Bradford, a writer and naturalist who is passionate about the importance of projects that connect people with the earth and teaching students to “better observe and tend the more-than-human world” www.ebradfield.com. While February was perhaps a less-than-ideal time to visit a garden, 8 GROW gardeners came out to meet with the students. The exchange of questions and ideas was an animated two-way conversation that was beneficial to all who participated. The students then wrote creative essays and poems from their experiences.



In the past we have also had visits from Waltham high school classes and summer day camps.

Waltham non-profit organizations have had GROW plots through the years. This year Work, Community, Independence, Inc.—dedicated to providing opportunities to people with a range of developmental and intellectual disabilities, autism, and acquired brain injury—continued to have a garden plot.

¹ Lee, A.C.K., H.C. Jordan, and J. Horsley, “Value of urban green spaces in promoting healthy living and well-being: prospects for planning,” Risk Management and Healthcare Policy, 27 August 2015, p. 131, <https://www.dovepress.com/article/download/23408>, accessed December 7, 2024.

Gardeners also arrange their own experiences that bring people of all ages to the plots. For example:

- One gardener is director of a psychiatric day program for adults at a local organization that used to be based in Waltham. She notes that of about 55 clients served by the program, the second largest demographic population lives in Waltham. As part of her program, she started a garden group over 10 years ago, recognizing the mental health, physical and developmental benefits of gardening.

“Making seasonal trips to GROW is a favorite field trip! We try to make a trip for each season; spring, summer and fall. People are so impressed with the diversity and beauty of the gardens.”

GROW gardener

In the past gardeners have contributed to produce donation drives organized by Waltham Fields Community Farms; but, this is the first year when gardeners organized their own drive. As mentioned earlier in this report, in August 2024 GROW collected 51 pantry items and 7 pounds of fresh, organic produce and donated it to the Salvation Army on 33 Myrtle Street, Waltham for their Food and Nutrition Program.

LOOKING FORWARD

We rode the wave of enthusiasm at our May garden kick-off and met two additional times with gardeners to discuss strategies for increasing gardener engagement and developing leadership opportunities. At the end of the gardening season, almost 45 people attended the annual meeting and 30th anniversary celebration in November 2024. We discussed the past, present, and future of GROW. To help focus our future plans, we asked attendees to vote with colored dots for ten projects they would like to see GROW initiate in the coming years. In 2025 we are looking forward to reviewing these project ideas and choosing some priorities, growing the board of directors, continuing and increasing many of the efforts mentioned in this report, solidifying a long-term plan, and continuing to provide the citizens of Waltham with the many assets of a community garden.



GREEN ROWS OF WALTHAM, INC.

Board of Directors:

Katharine Randel, President

Ailene Orlando, Treasurer

Scott Schurr, Secretary

Judith Rottenberg

Susan Rosen

committee@growcommunitygardens.org

For more information please see our website: <https://www.growcommunitygardens.org/>



“GROW is my sanctuary, it’s a place where I find peace and healing. I love the sun and the breeze... putting my hands in the soil, socializing with other gardeners, learning more each year... It helped me so much after my father’s passing and continues to help me physically, spiritually, and mentally.”

GROW gardener