

## Englewood, Auburn Gresham & Chatham

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# More Urban Gardens Planned for Englewood Updated March 21, 2013 6:22am

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ENGLEWOOD — Three years ago, Cordia Pugh completed an urban gardening class, and she's been growing her own vegetables and showing others how to do the same ever since.

"There are no grocery stores around here that sell fresh vegetables, unless you count Walgreens as a grocery store," said Pugh, 59, who moved to Englewood in 1959 from Chicago Heights. "I have helped train at least 52 residents about gardening, and now as a group we maintain our own garden."

Pugh serves as coordinator at [Hermitage Street Community Garden](#), 5643 S. Hermitage St. Started in April 2011, it occupies three lots donated by the Chicago nonprofit [Growing Home](#).

On Sunday, Mayor Rahm Emanuel laid out his vision for improving several neighborhoods, including Englewood, in a \$2.9 billion economic development [proposal](#).

U.S. Rep. Bobby Rush, whose 1st District includes portions of Englewood, praised the mayor's plans for more urban gardens.

"What Mayor Emanuel is doing is taking the steps in the right direction to address the desperate need for fresh produce and more food options in the Englewood community," Rush said. "You can get a french fry [in Englewood], but not a potato. You can get ketchup, but not a tomato."

The goal is to put vacant land to productive use and to stabilize Englewood, said Peter Strazzabosco, a spokesman for the mayor.

"The city owns 15,000 vacant lots, and those ... could be used to help build up neighborhoods," Strazzabosco said. "Englewood has an abundance of vacant lots that could be used for urban agriculture, housing and commercial development."

Strazzabosco said Englewood could have 10 acres of commercial farming in the next couple of years.

Planning for improvements in Englewood began in March 2011, when the city partnered with several organizations, including [Teamwork Englewood](#), to create the [Green Healthy Neighborhoods](#) land use plan. That plan identifies land-use policies and strategies that would better target public and private decisions, and investments in such things as housing, urban agriculture and parks.

A public meeting to discuss the plan will be from 5:30-7:30 p.m. March 27 at [Urban Prep Academy High School](#), 6201 S. Stewart Ave.

"The mayor sounds like he is on the right track to helping residents take ownership of their community," said Julie Samuels, a community organizer for Openlands, a Chicago nonprofit organization that has taught gardening since 2008.

"We offer a six-week class at the [Garfield Park Conservatory](#) where we teach people about the basics."

The current class ends March 31, and the fall class won't start until Oct. 12. Classes run from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturdays and cost \$300.

The mayor has said he wants [Kennedy-King College](#) to become an expert in farm-to-table urban agriculture, using 24 acres near the college.

Samuels said Openlands shares the mayor's vision of Kennedy-King as a training school for urban agriculture.

"Kennedy-King is already training students in culinary, hospitality and other industries. Why not urban agriculture, too?" Samuels said.

Besides the Hermitage garden, which Pugh said is the largest in Englewood, there is also the [Heritage](#)



**Station Community Garden** at 549 W. 63rd St. The garden was created in 2009 and sits below a closed train station used by blacks who came to Chicago during the **Great Migration**.

For Pugh, who also works as an executive assistant for a Chicago philanthropic organization, eating healthfully and growing her own food will be a lifelong endeavor.

"I am in good health because of the food I eat from my gardens," said the mother of five and grandmother of two. "And that's how I plan to stay living from now on."