Introducing the Bladensburg Community Garden: A Project of ECO City Farms

ECO City Farms was awarded a State of Maryland, Department of Natural Resources Green Equity grant for FY2025 to convert a 1/2 acre plot of Maryland Capital Area Park and Planning land in Bladensburg into a Community Garden. ECO City Farms has previously used this land for a Farmers Market and event site. It is adjacent to three schools: Port Towns Elementary School and Rogers Heights Elementary School, both Prince George's County public schools. It is also across the street from Elizabeth Seton High School, a private All-Girls Catholic High School, and walking distance to PGCPS' Bladensburg High School.

With this funding, ECO seeks to take one more important step in advancing food security and systems change in the Port Towns. Far too many Bladensburg children and their families are removed from the growing, processing, and distribution of fresh, locally-grown food. In fact, according to a Capital Food Bank report in 2024, more than 50% of people in the County are food insecure and have limited access to fresh fruit and vegetables of any kind. Healthy food choices are dependent upon both access and familiarity. By introducing farming, gardening, and nutrition education into school and neighborhood centers near where people live, work, study, and play, there is a greater chance that more of the community will be able, and choose, to eat more healthily.

We intend to create a space where the community can converge, collaborate, and retool together, thereby strengthening unity, stability, and sustainability. The community garden and outdoor classroom will occupy 10,000 square feet of land at 5801 Emerson Street, Bladensburg, Maryland, potentially serving the nearby schools, a large multifamily apartment complex, a small Parks Department community center and two senior housing facilities.

Local demand for community gardening space has particularly been ignited by the large and growing African population of Bladensburg, particularly immigrants from the Cameroon, who find it especially difficult to access the healthy vegetables they are accustomed to eating in their homeland, and are willing to expend the energy to produce it here, were land made available to them. Currently, nine Cameroon adults farm at ECO's very nearby Bladensburg farm. Bringing these and other African adults together with the area's children and youth of diverse ethnicities and cultures presents a great opportunity for mutual learning and community-building.

The initial funding available to us with this grant will pay for the design and build out of the garden and enclosing the entire perimeter with fencing, water and electrical access, a teaching pavilion, picnic tables, and a tool shed. We anticipate that the project will be able to accommodate approximately 8-10 large plots for more experienced gardeners and 5-6 smaller plots for beginners.

The Community Garden offers a unique opportunity to combine a multi-generational growing space with an outdoor flexible learning space for local children, teachers, and parents of the two elementary schools adjacent to the site.

ECO City Farms already operates an already highly visible farm very near the Community Garden site that has provided hundreds of tours for school children, community members, businesses, municipalities and non-profit organizations over the years. We anticipate that this garden will similarly provide space for community nutrition, education, and engagement.

Project Timeline

- May - June 2025: Pre-award phase and making connections with key partners (Town of Bladensburg, PGCPS Schmidt Center, PGCPS Board of Ed, Port Towns and Rogers Heights ES, Elizabeth Seton HS, Neighborhood Design Center, Park & Planning)
- July 2025: Anticipated completion of award contract and final approval from MD DNR
- Summer - Fall 2025: Design process with NDC for conceptual design and community engagement process and a landscape architect for final work plan
- Fall 2025 - Spring 2026: Garden construction
- Spring 2026: Garden Plot application process
- Summer 2026: Expected garden launch