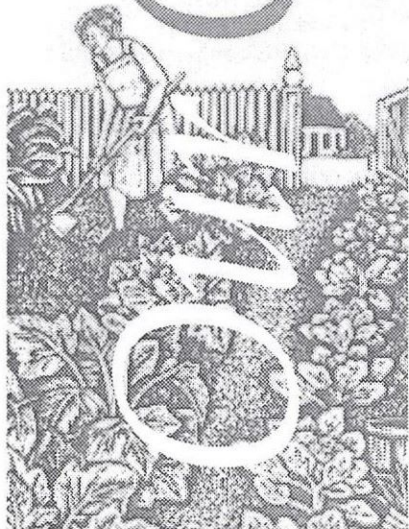


# Out Garden's Gate



*The Community Unity  
March To Save The Gardens,  
August 2, 1997*

Formed in November 1996 in response to the bulldozing of several gardens and the current threat to many more by development plans throughout New York City, **NYC Coalition for the Preservation of the Gardens** is a city-wide network of gardeners, community members, schools, and organizations working together to preserve community gardens in all 5 boroughs.

While community gardens occupy less than 1000 city owned sites, there are over 11,000 vacant lots and countless abandoned buildings in the City's inventory in all five boroughs. Because of the current administration's mandate to sell off city-owned property, city agencies have chosen to look at property with thriving community gardens and instead of seeing community resources, they see only vacant developable lots.

There are approximately 800 community gardens city-wide; of these, 716 are GreenThumb-licensed gardens. There are more than 24,000 gardeners city-wide and more than 480,000 people per year benefit from and participate in community gardens. *Source: NYC Coalition for the Preservation of Gardens.*

HPD, the City's housing agency, has jurisdiction over or holds for development on 395 GreenThumb gardens: 78 in the Bronx, 195 in Brooklyn, 113 in Manhattan, 9 in Queens, and none in Staten Island. (See *infra*. listing by borough of some of the most threatened gardens.)

In bulldozing the gardens and potentially displacing neighborhood low-income populations, the City has failed to acknowledge that community gardens represent more than the temporary use of vacant land. Community gardens have become important meeting places for New Yorkers, producing much needed green-space, promoting environmental-education, encouraging intergenerational and intercultural friendships, and helping to reduce crime by being the eyes and ears of our communities.

NYC Coalition provides critical information to gardeners, as to the status of their garden and what they can do *now* to preserve these important community resources. Although we have had some successes, the City continues to add gardens to the list of lots to be sold or auctioned in the next year, and moves ahead with plans for market-rate housing and commercial development on many garden sites.

The NYC Parks and Recreation Department expects that within the next 5 years HPD will reclaim most of the gardens it has either within its jurisdiction or on hold.\* However, merely because a garden falls under another

\**Source: Briefing Notes for Jane Cleaver, City Council Land Use Subcommittee for the Private Uses of Public Space, 8/21/97.*

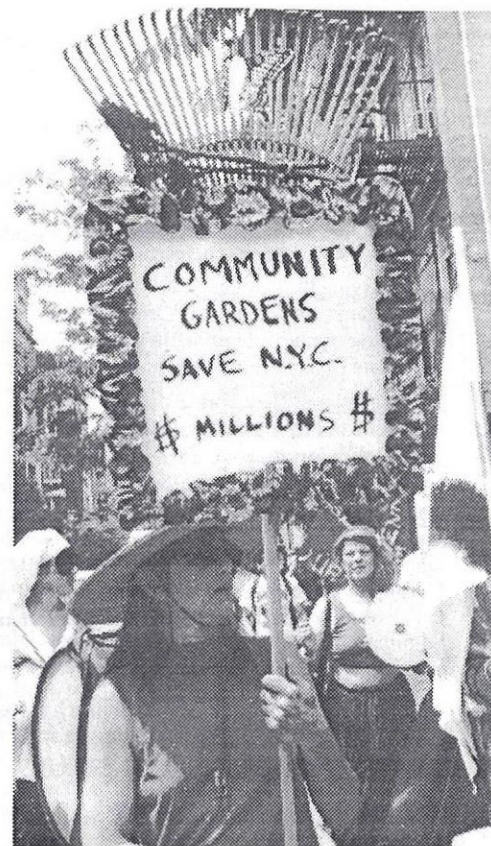


Photo: Todd Edelman

city department/agency jurisdiction does not ensure its safety. For example, the City Council conveyed an inactive site with a GreenThumb hold for building a RiteAid in Brooklyn on DGS/DGS land without telling GreenThumb. Furthermore, many of the gardens recently terminated by HPD, GreenThumb itself considered successful gardens, *i.e.* gardens that are "well-developed and maintained, that have generous

public access hours, that provide programming open to the entire neighborhood, and that have reached out to schools and community service facilities."

Alarming, it has also been noted that in the last several years there has been a decline in new GreenThumb gardens to replace terminated GreenThumb gardens.\* Most new gardens are on HPD property and so are to expect very short life-span. "If [ ] trends continue, there will be hardly any gardens with long-term potential to replace gardens reclaimed for development."

There is a mechanism in place whereby some gardens can be transferred to NYC Parks Department jurisdiction and some gardens have already been transferred. It has been estimated that approximately 20 gardens per year will meet "Parks standards" (purported to include overall physical design, level of maintenance, the group's organizational strength, public access, garden programming, and linkages to local schools and community service facilities). The group in stewardship of the community garden will have merely a short-term renewable license. HPD has so far strongly resisted to cooperate with GreenThumb and seems hesitant to consider allowing the transfer of land in its jurisdiction to Parks.

(Continued on page 4)

## Coalition Goals:

- 1) an inventory of all gardens for all City departments and offices;
- 2) a halt to the sale of gardens until environmental impact studies are performed
- 3) a review of all existing development plans by the City, to evaluate the needs of communities that may have changed since these plans were devised.