

Coalition members protest.  
Photo by Diane Greene

# Mayor Giuliani Orders Transfer of Green Thumb Gardens to H.P.D.

Community gardeners, open space advocates and community members citywide are outraged by Mayor Giuliani's unilateral decision to move community gardens one step closer to the bulldozer.

Responding to the Mayor's order, on April 24th Mary Bolton of the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) issued a memorandum requesting an "Emergency Hold and Transfer" of 741 Green Thumb Community Gardens. This sweeping request, approved by the City Land Committee (a committee of Giuliani appointees), places the majority of licensed Green Thumb lots under HPD's control. It also terminates the agreement between Green Thumb and the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation. Although the transfer of these properties from Parks to HPD will not directly effect the City's ability to determine the fate of each lot, the transfer strongly suggests that swift real estate development of the Community Garden sites is imminent. It also indicates that the Mayor is specifically targeting Community Garden lots for future real estate development plans.

By simply looking at the numbers, it is clear that targeting community gardens for real estate development is completely unreasonable. While community gardens occupy less than 1,000 city-owned sites, there are between 11,000 and 14,000 truly vacant lots, miles of

boarded buildings and warehoused apartments in the City's inventory. Yet, the current city administration continually dismisses these numbers. Instead they chose to view property with thriving community gardens as vacant developable lots. Elected officials also choose to ignore the fact that 33 out of 59 NYC Planning Districts fall below the City Planning Commission's open space requirement of 2.5 acres per 1,000 residents. In fact, over half of the City's Community Planning Districts have less than 1.5 acres of open space per 1,000 residents.\*

Community gardens are part of the solution to enriching our New York City communities and should be awarded and permanently preserved for their role. More than 24,000 gardeners in NYC tend the gardens each day, and more than 480,000 people benefit from the gardens each year. Along with gardening, community gardens provide a variety of additional activities which bring people together, including programs for children and teens aimed at heightening environmental awareness and instilling a sense of responsibility for one's community, music and dance performances, poetry readings, art installations, yoga classes and social events. All of this gardening activity creates community cohesion and makes our neighborhoods more safe, healthy, clean and peaceful.

\*Source: "The Loss of Equity: New York State's 1997 Draft Open Space Conservation Plan, Executive Summary" NYC Environmental Justice Alliance

## protest

### CITY TO AUCTION GARDENS COALITION PLANS PROTEST MONDAY, JULY 20 AT 9:00 AM AT ONE POLICE PLAZA

**Community gardeners and their supporters from all five Boroughs will rally to stop the auction of our community gardens at the NYC Public Auction.\***

Gardeners and their neighbors are alarmed at the prospect of the wholesale destruction of our neighborhoods. The unbridled sale of land all too often results in the destruction of gardens, loss of affordable housing, loss of community cultural centers and the displacement of entire communities. At the last Public Auction the gardeners of Holy Mary, Mother of Gardens and Umbrella Garden (both on the Lower East Side) witnessed the sale of their beloved gardens to luxury housing developers. We want to stop this from happening again.

At the upcoming auction, hundreds will gather to state that (1) communities themselves should determine the appropriate usage of public land, not outside financial interests, (2) community gardens are indispensable resources, not to be sacrificed to market forces, political deal making or misguided city planning, and (3) that the true role of city government is to secure our life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.

We urge you to get involved. The only way we will save our neighborhoods from the bulldozers is if you help. Help to organize in your own community by distributing leaflets, arranging transportation, making banners and posters (see "banner making workshops" in our List of Events on p.3), and bringing your friends and family members to the protest. Let the voices of the people be heard.

**For information, contact the Demonstration Planning Committee: (212) 777-7969**

\* A partial list of threatened sites includes: La Familia Unida, 12th Street btwn Aves. A & B (Parcel 44, Block 406, Lot 60), The Lower East Side Hispanic Committee, 5th Street & Ave D (Parcel 33, Block 375, Lot 44) and the Fourth St. Casita Garden 4th Street btwn Aves. B & C (Parcel 38, Block 387, Lot 43). Other citywide sites are also on the auction block.