



MKSK and Uptown United

INNOVATION

Following the pandemic in 2022, during a time of increased development in Uptown, heightened demand for communal green space and access to locally grown foods became critical. The existing Winthrop Garden had become overgrown, underutilized, and was no longer serving the growing community's needs. More garden plots were needed to accommodate an increased interest in local food production, while additional community space was needed for neighborhood gatherings.

In a densely populated urban area, where open space is scarce, flexibility is the innovative opportunity for creating a successful public space. Likewise, where most urban spaces contain hardscaped surfaces and impermeable materials, the garden utilizes porous aggregate paving and elevated planters to aid in stormwater management and reduce heat island effects. This approach applies sustainable design practices for a resilient and sustainable overlay on top of an already efficiently designed space.

Another innovative approach can be seen in its layered design; a multi-use space containing community garden plots, plazas, a performance area, a programmable market space and a storage and vending structure. The space exhibits inherent flexibility by layering varied programmatic uses throughout its design. As a result, the garden can be used during various times of day for gardening programs, family-oriented programming, performances with music, food and dancing, and on weekends for markets and craft fairs. The garden's renovation allows this reestablished space to flex for various programming activations while retaining its place as a beloved yet sustainable community gathering spot.

OUTCOME

The process of developing the Winthrop Garden has always been rooted in the community. Since its inception in 2009, local residents and members of the Winthrop family have played an integral role in envisioning, creating and caring for the garden. Through the most recent process to redesign and renovate the garden, the community has been engaged and in close collaboration with Uptown United and the designers who developed the new garden design based on their preferences and valued input.

Today, gardeners consist of neighboring residents and members of the original Winthrop families. Not only do they tend to the garden plots, but they watch over and help care for this community space, curating wholesome fresh foods and continuing the tradition of strengthening the community in which they live.

Through grant funding made available for the project and the close proximity of Uptown United to the garden itself, it's anticipated that Uptown United will run and manage a range of programming over the first three years. Over that time, the garden will continue to grow and evolve, as will the surrounding community. Through the support and oversight of Uptown United, the garden will have a long life ahead as a programmatic community space and even when the grant funding runs out, the momentum for the garden that's developed over time will allow for continued success of this public space for many years to come.

EXECUTION

Over several months, Uptown United developed a robust community engagement process that gauged Winthrop family, gardener and neighbor input for the renovated community space. Through that process, Uptown United was empowered to apply for the POP! Grant with materials that were developed based on community desires. After winning the grant, the garden's design developed over two short months, and the construction of the garden took place the following three months, highlighting the agility of the design and construction team to take a representative idea and transform it into a constructed public space within an accelerated timeframe. Though expedited, the materiality and quality for the project was not compromised. Rather, the design and construction team was resourceful in working together to seek out and acquire materials that could be procured within an expedited schedule. The innovative collaboration between community partners, designers and contractors was fast-paced, creative and focused on developing a meaningful space envisioned by the community and for the community.

REPRESENTATION

Chicago's Uptown neighborhood is known for its rich, dynamic history and mingling of cultures and customs. However, pre-World War II land covenants and legal segregation listed the 4600 block of North Winthrop Avenue as Uptown's only block where African Americans could live. Partly due to this racism and segregation, the families who lived on Winthrop Avenue in the early 1900s developed a tight-knit bond.

The development of a new design for the renovated garden held fresh opportunities to share this untold story while visually representing today's culturally diverse community through the design – as individual threads woven together, forming a rich tapestry rooted in the neighborhood through its past heritage and rich cultural diversity seen in the community today. The garden redesign brought members of the original Winthrop family together with local gardeners, neighborhood residents and Uptown United to reimagine this community space and later rededicate it. Family members shared impactful stories from their lives and the rich purpose they had living together as a community within the Uptown neighborhood. At the same time, newer Uptown residents, local leaders and city officials gathered to learn more about the true power of community and what it can teach us today.

REPLICATION

Replication of the ideas behind the Winthrop Family Garden is impactful flexibility and creating multi-purpose urban spaces that can be programmed for a wide variety of uses throughout varied times of day and ranging across seasons of the year. Underlying a flexible and successful space should be a meaningful environment centered around an impactful idea, whether the heritage of the neighborhood and site or through the dedication of a theme or a meaningful idea. When public spaces hold meaning and inspiration, people care about them. Beloved spaces produce stewards who will maintain those spaces over time, allowing for vibrancy, activity and sustainability to produce success.

COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY

The solution for the Winthrop Family Historical Garden leveraged pre-existing histories, cultures and physical frameworks and strengthened them into a forward-thinking, cohesive and experiential space. Though seemingly complex, this led to a simple strategy for the design and implementation of the project: build upon pre-existing resources to enrich the site's use for today. Whether building a creative design plan utilizing existing concrete pathways, developing color palettes based upon a muralist's vision, or simply giving voice to a family's 100-year-old story, merging the site's needs by utilizing the existing available resources provided a simplistic yet informative framework to work within. Existing conditions and materials, while sometimes viewed as challenges, ultimately served to simplify the solution by providing an enriched and meaningful design framework for the re-imagined Winthrop Family Historical Garden.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Explore Uptown: Winthrop Family Garden 2022 Ribbon Cutting:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmEWXB7yPNc&ab_channel=ExploreUptown%21

World Landscape Architect: 2023 WLA Awards Shortlist Announced:

<https://worldlandscapearchitect.com/2023-wla-awards-shortlist-announced/?v=7516fd43adaa>

MKSK: Winthrop Family Community Garden

<https://www.mkskstudios.com/dialogue/winthrop-family-historical-garden-pays-tribute-to-uptown-chicagos-historic-roots>

Landscape Architecture Magazine: Family Gathering: <https://www.mkskstudios.com/dialogue/winthrop-family-historical-garden-pays-tribute-to-uptown-chicagos-historic-roots%22%E2%80%A2https://landscapearchitecturemagazine.org/2023/01/26/family-gathering/>

Chicago YIMBY: Winthrop Garden POP! Plaza Opens At 4628 N Winthrop Avenue in Uptown: <https://chicagoyimby.com/2022/10/winthrop-garden-pop-plaza-opens-at-4628-n-winthrop-avenue-in-uptown.html>

Uptown Update: Winthrop Garden Muralist To Be Featured on WGN On Monday: <https://www.uptownupdate.com/2022/10/winthrop-garden-muralist-to-be-featured.html>

Dis/Placements: History of the Winthrop Avenue Family: <https://dis-placements.com/winthrop-description>