



CCRUN Final Reporting '24: Blog Post

GreenRoots, Inc.

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Our CCRUN Grant enabled GreenRoots to continue moving forward on an aspirational community engaged project that has been in motion since 2021. The vacant lot at 212 Congress Ave (picture below) was an underutilized space amidst a dense, diverse neighborhood in Chelsea, MA, a frontline environmental justice community GreenRoots has been working to mitigate the urban heat island effect in Chelsea in



collaboration with the Boston University's School of Public Health through a project called C-HEAT. During the first phase of C-HEAT, researchers, municipal staff, and GreenRoots used satellite data to determine that this neighborhood was one of the hottest in the city, and was a priority for intervention given the proximity to highly dense housing, the Boys & Girls club, a



soccer field and playground, and an Islamic Center. This determination led to the experimental pilot "Cool Block" project, where GreenRoots engages community members around this block to collaborate with the City of Chelsea and other partners to implement cooling strategies around the block. The block level approach consists of significant tree planting along the block's perimeter and two major interventions at each bookend: the installation of a white roof at the Boys and Girls Club and at the

other end, the transformation of 212 Congress Ave. into a lush, new, permanent green space with cooling and hydration stations.



GreenRoots has held numerous community engagement and visioning events to gather feedback, understand needs, and collect ideas from the community. Community feedback and input has been essential to thinking about how this vacant lot could be transformed into a community space that also provides cooling effects for the whole neighborhood. During our grant period, we expanded upon and continued the ongoing work to transform the lot by implementing temporary heat mitigation solutions. These solutions offered immediate accessibility to residents, and supported visioning and community



feedback for the longer-term design. In the spring and summer, we held over 20 community events at the 212 Congress lot, now nicknamed “Blooming Park.” Events included art and greenspace outreach days, a neighborhood construction concerns meeting, a heat-focused fair,



clean up and park improvement volunteer work time, a press conference with Senator Markey about climate legislation, “Tree Keeper” program events, and Indigenous artist-led seed planting events. We utilized grant funding to purchase materials for projects designed with and led by youth from the Boys & Girls Club in collaboration with the Boston Society of Landscape Architects and Northeastern University. The grant also allowed us to provide stipends to 15

families in the neighborhood and support them in participating in a summer-long tree watering “Tree Keepers” program. The Tree Keepers program has had many benefits including increased survivability of newly planted trees, which ensures new trees grow to shade-bearing height, and supports residents in becoming stewards of the land. This agency and ownership has been extremely empowering for our community members. Through our continued C-HEAT project collaboration with the BU School of Public Health, we continued heat monitoring and data



collection that will allow us to start to understand how these interventions affect the neighborhood's exposure to extreme heat.

We are so inspired by the work that we've accomplished on this project and the collaboration that has been sparked by this small vacant lot. Our hope is to continue community engagement in the neighborhood while the lot becomes a permanent park and community space.



Additionally, we will continue supporting and empowering residents to have a voice in their future and minimize the negative impacts of climate change and extreme heat. We are extremely grateful to the community that CCRUN has fostered. We have been energized to hear about and learn from the other communities in our cohort and how their projects are impacting their local communities. It will be incredible to see all this work and effort culminate in a permanent, cooling-focused community space in environmental justice communities across the nation, in part made possible by the support from the CCRUN grant.