

For IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**WHAT:** Community Urban Agriculture Day to highlight plans for Educational Community Garden in Astoria

**WHO:** Astoria Urban Agriculture Alliance with Astoria Fridges, The Connected Chef, Astoria Mutual Aid Network and neighbors

**DATE:** Saturday, October 24, 2020, 10:30 AM – 2 PM

**WHERE:** The Sitting Area, Hoyt Avenue North between 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Streets, Astoria

### **Communal Educational Garden Kicks Off**

QUEENS- In response to the need for more public open space, food insecurity, lack of fresh produce options, and health and wellness programs, Astoria Urban Agriculture Alliance announced its plans to transform a long - neglected piece of public land into a public communal hub for gardening, skill sharing, education, and community building at a community-building kick off event held at The Sitting Area on Hoyt Avenue North between 19th and 21st Streets in Astoria.

The event brought together community partners and neighbors and included gardening and urban agriculture activities. About 200 people visited the event throughout the day, getting free seeds, pots, and soil, exchanging urban gardening tips, and enjoying skillshares on soil by Gil Lopez, bokashi compost by Bianca Bibiloni, and cardboard box composting by Jenny Lin. Astoria Fridges, which spearheaded the creation of community refrigerators full of free food for food-insecure community members, collected a large amount of food to stock the refrigerators, and The Connected Chef Lifeline Grocery Project shared information about their equitable grocery program.

“Our vision is to create a collaborative public space where people from all backgrounds and cultures can enjoy community gardening while addressing environmental sustainability, food justice, the need for more public outdoor spaces, and the impact of COVID-19 on our lives,” said Evie Hantzopoulos, Co-founder of Astoria Urban Agriculture Alliance, longtime resident, and avid gardener.

The plans for the transformation of The Sitting Area, which now consists of broken asphalt, empty tree pits, and a few trees, has been approved by the NYC Parks Department and presented to Community Board 1, Queens Parks Committee. AUAA is bringing together neighborhood residents, non-profits, and grassroots groups that have mobilized to address critical needs during COVID-19. Partners include Astoria Park Alliance, Astoria Houses, Lifeline Groceries, Global Kids, Astoria Fridges, The Connected

Chef, and Old Astoria Neighborhood Association. The garden hopes to partner with Operation Green Thumb, and will be open to all.

Astoria resident and AUAA co-founder Bianca Bibioni, a science teacher with expertise in urban farming, urban agriculture education, and hydroponics, said "Astoria Urban Agriculture Alliance is working towards ensuring that our neighbors and community members have equitable access to spaces where they can grow food, share essential skills, grow healthy communities, and steward land in a way that restores balance to our urban ecosystem. We're excited for Sitting Area to be a space where that can happen."

Astoria resident and AUAA co-founder Megan Stotts, a local parent who has been trying to translate the skills she learned on the farm growing up to the urban environment said, "This space is meant to help people reimagine what a garden can look like. It doesn't need to be a large grassy space. It doesn't have to be horizontal. It can be vertical, it can be in tiny tree pits. It can be on your balcony, in your kitchen. We not only have a shortage of community gardens, but also a shortage of imagination regarding what a garden can be. Sitting Area is meant to address both issues."

Kyra Cuevas, AUAA member and city planner, said, "This proposal provides our neighborhood with an opportunity to rethink and evaluate: land use and access; and food creation and distribution in an equitable way. As a community, we understand that land and food access are racial justice issues. Providing more open space to the public and for public is one of our ways of tackling these issues head-on."

Anyone who supports this vision is welcome to sign AUAA's community letter of support for the sitting garden, which can be found here: <http://chng.it/H59zfXWL>

For more information, please contact [astoria.uaa@gmail.com](mailto:astoria.uaa@gmail.com)

The event is free to the public. For more information on AUAA please visit: <https://astoriauaa.wixsite.com/mysite> and click on "our proposal".

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### **About Astoria Urban Agriculture Alliance**

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