Introduction:

The Reston Bible Church ("RBC") property currently spans approximately 22 acres with areas of unused land. With just ten 8 foot by 4 foot gardening beds, for example, RBC can harvest approximately 1,370 pounds of fresh peppers and tomatoes in a single season. That's over four thousand dollars at your average grocery store (Tomatoes $0.20 oz at Giant). These sorts of vegetables do not typically find their way into food banks, such as RBCs, because of their higher cost and value to the donors.

While we may not be able to miraculously turn a few loaves and fish into a feast for the multitudes, we believe the harvest of a community garden can similarly feed the bodies and souls of many. This proposal recommendation provides the supporting plan, investment (APPENDIX) and strategy for RBC to adopt its very own community garden.

Statement of Goals:

The heartbeat of this project aligns to the commands of the Christian life and the mission of RBC. To this end, the community garden can be summarized by the following vision and goals:

1) To provide fresh, nutritious food to our neighbors in need.

2) To bring together the body of Christ at RBC in fellowship.

3) To provide teaching opportunities for both our youth as well as for our adult members.

4) To provide an outreach mechanism to those who do not know Christ.

Through this community garden and God's provision and blessing, we anticipate these goals will provide numerous benefits. Benefits which have been proven in personal gardening experience and in the history and heritage of our biblical ancestors.

As a gardener supporting northern Virginia area food banks, Rob has witnessed firsthand the impact that community gardens have on feeding those in need. The Capitol Area Food Bank in DC is probably the single largest supplier of food (45 million pounds to 645,000 people per year) to those in need in the D.C. area. Columbia Baptist Church "Crossroads Garden" currently supports food needs for hundreds of families, in addition to providing nutritional education.

Agriculture played a massive role in the Israelite community and brought together tons for work and celebration of the harvest. Indeed the Hebrew scriptures specifically refer to gleaning as one of the forms of "tzedakah" (charity). We envision the community garden bringing together friends and families of the RBC community. In hard work and in fun, the garden will inevitably create a strong sense of fellowship and belonging and teaches the importance of service to others, which is service to Christ.

The community garden will provide wonderful teaching opportunities for the congregation and the community at large. The community garden can be leveraged within our own ministries (e.g., children, youth, First Fruits, and more) as well as public educational events where those who are interested could attend and learn how they can grow their own gardens. This may sound lofty, but it is being done by Master Gardeners in every county in Virginia.

Gardening teaches the value of hard work for a future reward. In this age where so many are used to getting "instant gratification" with the click of a mouse, this can be a very important lesson, especially for our youth.

We are all familiar with the old expression that if you give someone a fish, you have given him food for a single day, but if you teach him how to fish, you have provided sustenance for the rest of his life. This is exactly what we could do for those in our community who have access to a plot to grow food but have either not thought of this possibility or, if they have, are simply too intimidated to start their own gardens.

Finally, we think that we could serve as a "pilot" for other congregations. We all have spent enough time driving through Fairfax and Loudoun Counties to appreciate that so many of these congregations have large open lots amenable to growing food, but which remain unused. If our efforts to establish a thriving productive garden at RBC are successful, it could provide a model for other congregations to do the same thing and have a "ripple" effect in northern Virginia. In this sense, an RBC community garden could find itself in the forefront of spearheading a program that could do a world of good beyond its own walls. This particular brand of missionary work promotes the highest ideals of our faith.

General Plan:

There are six basic requirements to raise vegetables: (1) soil; (2) water; (3) sunlight; (4) seeds/plants, (5) labor and (6) tools. Additional requirements include fertilizer, pesticides, and barriers to animals and composting equipment..

(1) <u>Soil</u>

The most important and most costly part of the garden is providing good soil. Regrettably northern Virginia's soil primarily consists of red clay which is difficult to work and not ideal for growing vegetables. For this as well as other reasons on which we can elaborate if necessary, we definitely want to use "raised beds." Raised beds are typically squares or rectangles formed from wooden boards into which are filled a suitable soil. Below is an illustration:

One of the biggest advantages of raised beds is that we don't have to dig into the clayey and rocky soil and add all sorts of soil amendments. This is backbreaking work and it takes years to really get the soil to the point where you want it. By contrast, with a raised bed you simply place the frame on the ground and fill it with top soil that can be purchased from a garden center relatively inexpensively.

We would suggest working with 8 x 4 raised beds. Four feet is the optimum width because a worker can easily reach the entirety of the bed. We also need to decide how high the beds should be. 8" would be the minimum but we would recommend at least 1' to ensure that we have sufficient depth for all types of plants. In the APPENDIX we provide the cost of cedar 8' x 4' x 15" raised beds, which would be perfect for our purposes. For the initial year, we should think about no more than ten 8 x 4 raised beds, which would provide us with a total of 320 square feet of gardening area. This is a very respectable starting point in that it will provide a significant amount of food but won't be so overwhelming as we work through the inevitable glitches that any endeavor encounters during its first year of launch. Ultimately the goal would be to at least double that size, once we're up and running and have worked out the glitches.

Raised beds are incredibly easy to build so with the help of a few people, we could have the whole thing together in a single day. We would then just need to have a bulk delivery of soil which we could transfer into each raised bed.

(2) <u>Water</u>

This proposal assumes that there would be a supply of water in the vicinity of the garden. More often than not, July and August are quite dry in northern Virginia so such a supply is really essential. There are two basic ways to provide water to the garden. One is the old fashioned way-- simply go out there with a sprayer and spray away at each bed until the soil is sufficiently moist. The advantage of this is that it costs very little and requires no setting up. The disadvantage is that someone has to go out and manually water which, depending on the weather, may have to be done several times a week. The other disadvantage is that overhead spray watering tends to be less efficient in terms of water loss. It can also promote the spread of plant diseases.

The other way to water is to provide a drip irrigation system. This requires an initial cash investment of hundreds of dollars and takes some time to set up. Once set up, however, it automatically waters the plants, results in little water loss, and is better for the health of the plants.

The best approach here is to keep it simple and cheap for starters because the idea in the beginning is to ensure that the concept succeeds. We don't have to be perfect the first year or two. If it proceeds as we hope, we can readdress at a later time.

(3) Sunlight

This part is easy. Sunlight is free and readily available. The only thing we have to concern ourselves with is placing the raised beds in an area where they will receive a minimum of 8-10 hours of direct sunlight.

(4) Seeds/Plants

This part is also easy. We will have access to many free seeds and, to the extent we will need to purchase seeds, they are inexpensive and easy to obtain. We will also have access to some of the resources of The Capitol Food Bank garden which will be able to provide us many of the plants that we will require, such as tomatoes, and peppers. We've already had discussions with Sydonne Fingal of RBC's food pantry and she has advised us of the best vegetables that we could provide to meet the food pantries needs. They include cabbage, broccoli, spinach, lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, green beans and cucumbers. All these things are fairly easy to grow.

(5) Labor

For labor, we should think about two different groups. The first would be a core group (ourselves included) who would take basic responsibility for planting, upkeep, and harvesting. In a Congregation of RBC's size, I would guess that we could send out an announcement for a group of 5 to 10 additional people, preferably some who themselves have gardening experience, to form part of the core group with the day to day responsibility. The second group would be youth volunteers (both middle and high school age) who could cycle in and out for

various specific tasks. We assume we could touch base with the youth coordinators at the church to set this up and discuss the best way to do it. For small children, we like the idea of a large potato “bag” (I actually have one). The kids can harvest the potatoes and you can set it up as sort of a treasure hunt. Then they could bring their prizes to the food pantry and learn the value of helping others.

(6) Tools

Here is where we definitely keep it simple. A couple of hoses, a couple of spades, two or three trowels, a couple of watering cans, a couple of hoes, a pitchfork, a garden rake, a pruner, a measuring tape and some buckets and baskets.

Other requirements

We would need fertilizers and pesticides, for which we provide a budget. We recommend an emphasis on organic environmentally friendly materials, as we want to emphasize that we are commanded to be stewards of the earth.

We will also need tomato cages. As we are emphasizing tomatoes as one of our principle focuses in the garden, we will probably want to obtain at least 15 cages.

Inevitably, we will also have to deal with unwanted four-legged visitors. With a maximum of ten raised beds, we can probably just set up a very inexpensive netting around the perimeter of each bed with nothing more than a roll of garden netting, some 1 x 2’s and a staple gun. I can tell you from personal experience that the old adage from “Field of Dreams” will otherwise come true-”If you build it, they (the critters) will come.”

Finally, we will want two or three compost bins. Dead plants from the garden as well as any vegetative waste from the church’s kitchen could be turned into rich compost. In addition to benefiting the garden, this again provides a great teaching lesson about responsible stewardship of the environment. The cost for the bins would be de minimus.

Conclusion:

The opportunity to serve God and our neighbors while building community and belonging is at the heart of the RBC community garden. To see the men, women, and children of RBC, obeying one of God’s first commands given in His original garden, to steward and work the land, is a vision we want to make possible through this project.

APPENDIX

Cost Breakdown

Below we provide estimated costs. One thing to bear in mind is that the raised beds, soil, deer fencing/posting, compost bin and tool costs are one-time costs and can therefore be amortized. Composting will ultimately save on soil and fertilizer costs. I have not included water costs but certainly that could amount to several hundred dollars depending on how much rain we get.

Item(s)	Cost
Ten 8' x 4' x 15" Raised Beds	$2400.00
400 ft^3 soil @ $33.50/$yd^3$	$500.00
Sixty 1" x 2" pine posts	$60.00
Three rolls of 7'x100 ft. netting @$50/roll	$150.00
Seeds/Plants (many will be free)	Approx. $200.00
Tools	Approx. $300 to $400
Ten 35 lb bags Epsoma Fertilizer @$20/bag	$200.00
Pesticides	$200.00
Three Compost bins @$25/bin	$75.00
15 Tomato cages @ $10/cage	$150.00
Total	$4335

Soil Price quoted by Virginia Ground Covers, 21585 Cascades Parkway, Sterling, VA 20166(703) 450-4758; Fax: (703) 450-0291 Email; info@vagroundcovers.com