

**cog**  
**DESIGN**  
community outreach group  
for landscape design

# Impact Report 2023-2025





# Contents

Our Mission

Our Theory of Change

Our Impact

Our Stories

Our Finances

Our People



Artwork by Jiayu Wu, Designer for COGdesign

As COGdesign moves beyond celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2022, this Impact Report reflects an organization grounded in experience and focused on localized action. Over its history, COGdesign has partnered with communities to design more than 150 projects, many of which continue to move toward installation, each shaped by local priorities, lived experience, and care for place.

From 2023–2025, COGdesign advanced its strategic plan while working in close partnership with 14 community clients and collaborating with over 20 professional designers across Eastern Massachusetts. Community design and engagement remained central to this work - listening first, building trust, and responding to neighborhood-identified needs.

This period also strengthened how we understand and communicate impact. Through reflective practice and participatory learning with community partners and designers, we clarified a Theory of Change rooted in practice: that equitable access to nature is created not only through built spaces, but through the relationships and shared leadership that make them possible.

This report documents both outcomes and evolution - projects designed and installed, partnerships sustained, and an organization deepening its role as a steward of design as a public good. We are grateful to the communities, designers, funders, and collaborators who make this work possible, and we invite you to continue shaping what comes next.

With appreciation,

Staci Jasin  
Executive Director



# Our Mission

We expand access to green and open spaces through community-informed participatory landscape design and planning.





# Our Theory of Change

**We believe in democratizing landscape design.**

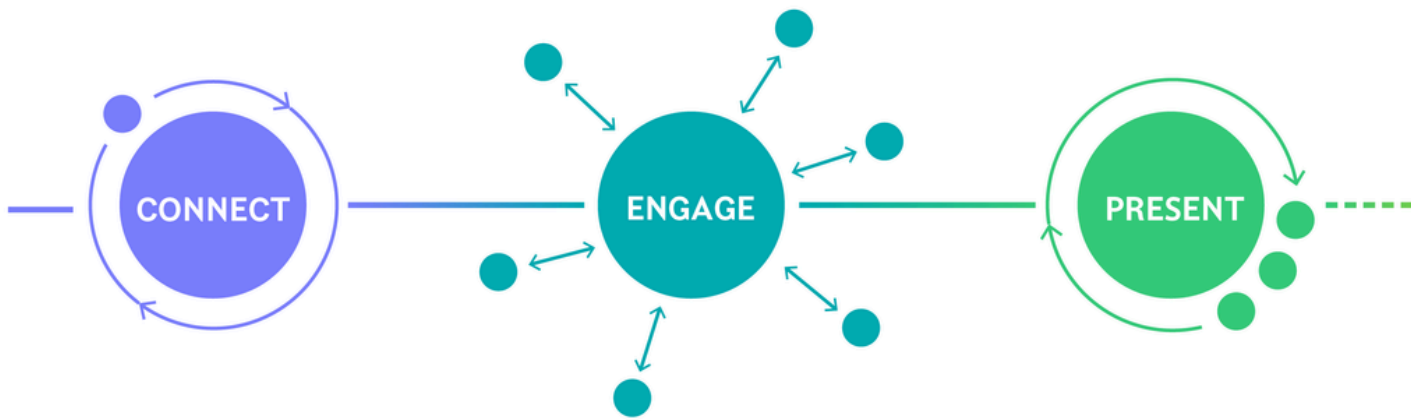
By centering resident voices and removing barriers to design and planning expertise, we empower communities to grow their neighborhood green spaces, equipping them with the tools, partnerships, and power to transform bold visions into sustainable, inclusive, and lasting places of individual and collective belonging and wellbeing.





# Our Community Design Process

COG design



## I. Initial Idea

- Community reaches out to COG.
- Community and COG define the project scope.

## II. Design Team

- COG visits site, engages community partners, designers, and stakeholders.
- COG facilitates iterative design sessions between the design team.

## III. Conceptual Design

- COG presents final conceptual design for the community.
- COG provides a cost estimate and funding options.

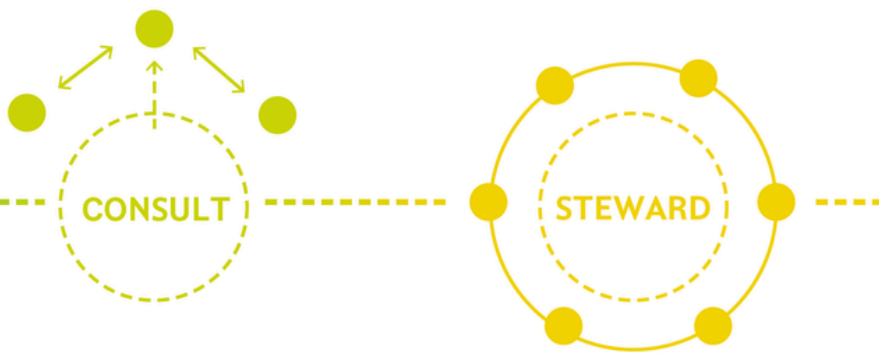
At COGdesign, design is not a one-time service - it is a relationship we build.

Our process supports community clients from an initial spark of an idea through collaborative design and into long-term care. We stay involved long enough to ensure that projects are not only well designed, but well held by the people who use them.

This process reflects COG's role as a connector, facilitator, and steward of community knowledge, adapting our level of involvement as projects grow.

# Design as a Catalyst for Community-Led Change

## POST-COG design



### IV. Project Development

- Community partner fundraises for design development and construction
- COG supports partner to select a licensed design team to develop COG's conceptual design.

### V. Long-term Care

- Community realizes its dream of neighborhood green space.
- Community takes responsibility for long term use and care of the space.

COGdesign's theory of change is rooted in a simple belief: when communities are supported by skilled designers, shared learning, and long-term relationships, public green spaces become more equitable, resilient, and enduring.

Our design process is the engine behind all three of our program areas - adapting to different needs while maintaining a consistent commitment to community leadership and care.



“

*The work of COGdesign is so important.*

*It matches deserving communities with professional landscape designers who generously provide their time to bring high quality design to communities that otherwise could not afford that service.*

*The result is a multitude of wonderful neighborhood playgrounds, parks, and gardens.*

Anne Whiston-Spirn

Author, Landscape Architect, COG Supporter

Professor of Landscape Architecture and Planning, MIT School of Architecture and Planning



Community design presentation at Mozart Park, 2024

# Our Impact & Influence

Between 2023 and 2025, COGdesign partnered with community leaders, designers, and researchers to better understand the impacts of our work. Through storytelling, interviews, and participatory evaluation across five community projects, we found that community-designed green spaces strengthen health, connection, learning, and local capacity while helping communities access resources and advocate for future investment.



## 2023-2025 Highlights

**14**  
Community clients supported

**20+**  
Landscape architects & designers engaged

**5**  
Projects included in impact research

**9**  
New community projects designed

**9**  
Community projects advanced into implementation

**150+**  
Community projects supported since 1997

Advancing conversations on community design, environmental justice, climate resilience, and public health.

### Recognition

- Community Health Leaders Fellow, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
- Massachusetts Ecosystem Climate Adaptation Network Award, UMass Amherst

### Knowledge Sharing

- Harvard Law School Climate Connect Symposium
- International Society for Environmental Epidemiology
- Harvard Chan NIEHS Center for Environmental Health
- Harvard Black Health Matters Annual Conference

# Gore Street Community Garden, Mission Hill, 2018-2023



Community Client:  
**Mary Ann Nelson, Mission Hill  
Health Movement**

Landscape Designers:  
**Laura Feddersen**

Supporters:  
**Mission Hill Health Movement,  
City of Boston**

## About

For Mary Ann Nelson, the story of Gore Street started in the 1980s, when she first moved into a building adjacent to the then vacant lot and started graduate school at Boston University School of Law. In the first few years, as Mary Ann came to notice, this vacant lot was primarily used for parking, and so, at first, Mary Ann paid little attention to the lot; that was until she started to notice that her neighbor planted flowers on one of the sides.

It was that inciting design that allowed Mary Ann to envision the lot as a greenspace, possibly a guerrilla orchard, but she was not yet able to enact any plans due to the demands of a high-pressure job. It was when her high pressure work ended that she was able to start digging.

“I was looking out the window at this lot, [thinking] what can we do? So I decided to plant fruit trees. And I started off one day at Home Depot, [and saw] an apple tree on clearance. I purchased it, I brought it home, I planted it on the site, and I thought it was pretty good and it was working pretty well. And then about a couple years, a year or two later, I thought, okay, I should buy another tree to plant in there. So I got a second tree, a pear tree... and I thought it was pretty good and it was working pretty well... But it turned out with this tree that everytime, wherever I was digging, I was running into the foundation. This used to be two buildings on the site. So I got discouraged and said, I'll just dig some other time, and never got the second tree in.” *Mary Ann Nelson, President, Mission Hill Health Movement*



# The challenges & the solutions

Years after starting to dig, Mary Ann, then with the Mission Hill Health Movement, learned about COGdesign, serendipitously, through an outreach email. After conversations between Jennifer Kimball, COGdesign's executive director, and the Mission Hill Health Movement, Laura Feddersen, a designer, was matched with the site. With Laura's design service, the team secured around \$68,000 in city funding.



"COG was helpful in the beginning to give us something to apply to the degree of. It wouldn't have been [possible] to do this at all without the grant. So that was really key, just to be able to give the city. Here's our design. Here's like a pretty picture of what it's going to look like." *Mary Ann Nelson*

While Mary Ann's dreams of creating the garden had existed for nearly 40 years prior, construction came together fairly quickly following receipt of their funding--to give life to this growing community vision. Within the following five years, and after overcoming several logistical challenges together, the community garden at Gore Street finally came together.

"I guess when they completed it, it was really in the winter or late fall. And when I went over there and it was completed, it was like, snowy... I mean, it was just really amazing that it ended up happening. It was a rocky road to get there, but it was great to see it done. It was really great for me to be able to design a community garden and just be able to say, here's the ideal scenario on this site for us to be able to grow." *Laura Feddersen*



Now, assigned garden plots rotating every three years keep individuals throughout the community engaged in the garden, and the Mission Hill Health Movement works with residents to help them learn how to and grow their own produce. Mary Ann and Laura's combined efforts have revitalized this vacant lot and eventually led to the garden being named "Rookie Garden of the Year" in 2022 by The City of Boston.

In the future, the Mission Hill Health Movement plans to use the space for workshops on gardening, and hopes to involve more students in their programming.

**ABOVE ALL, IN THIS HIGHLY TRANSIENT NEIGHBORHOOD, RESIDENTS, DESIGNERS, AND THE CITY WERE ABLE TO BUILD A LASTING GREENSPACE.**

# Abolition Row Park, New Bedford, MA 2016-2023



Community Client:  
**New Bedford Historical Society**

Landscape Designers:  
**Heather Heimarck Barbara Connelly**

Supporters:  
**City of New Bedford  
Massachusetts Office of Travel and  
Tourism**

## About

Over 10 years ago, residents of New Bedford, MA set course for a new community development, with the goal to transform a burnt-out lot in the historic district into a multipurpose greenspace.

Project planning throughout was led by Lee Blake of the New Bedford Historical Society and Mary Rapoza, Director of the City's Parks, Recreation and Beaches. As they were connected to COGdesign, COG was able to connect them with experienced park designers, Heather Heimarck, and Barbara Conolly. Heather and Barbara worked with Lee to build their design based on community feedback. And it was following COG's involvement liaising these pro bono design services, that this tripartite collaboration gained momentum--momentum that allowed the project to continue through the COVID-19 pandemic.



“Not only did [COG] help do the landscape design, but they helped us bring people together. Barbara and Heather would come to the meetings, and people had a lot of questions, and they would talk about the importance of saving black space... and a lot of people in the room didn't know about Frederick Douglass.” *Lee Blake, President, New Bedford Historical Society*

# Impact

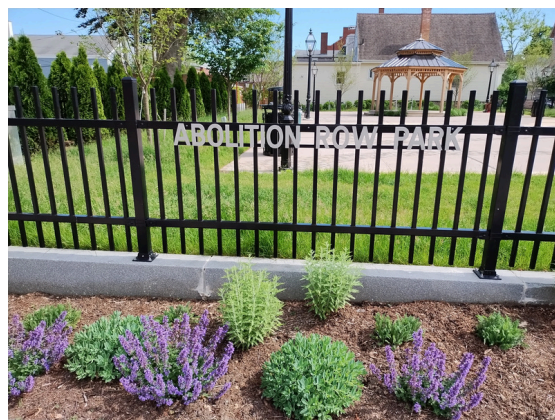
Convening members of the community, the team was able to incorporate the feedback from these meetings into the ultimate design of the park. As described, “people would respond to questions about place-making and storytelling. Then we'd have people vote with sticker dots to help us to create a list of community priorities... So this kind of community building and articulating a vision, I think, is really a powerful part of the master plan. And that's a really big part of what COG does in the early gestation phase of the project, getting everybody around the table and to start to coalesce around the priorities and the ideas and objectives.” *Heather Heimarck, Designer*

As development continued, and the momentum of this community will brought work through the COVID-19 pandemic, local educators, the South Coast women’s history trail, and volunteer carpenters and videographers all joined to support the work.

Since the park’s opening, which saw attendance of over 500 people, Abolition Row has engaged residents in a continuous dialogue about history and preservation. The result of this effort is a park that provides green space and stands as a living educational resources embedded in the Abolition Row District. The park has seen many community events including field trips and birthday parties. The New Bedford Garden Club and nearby schools remain actively involved in tending to the park's natural environment as well, caring for the garden, and holding pollination projects.

“[Initially], the city wasn't too keen on the idea. They didn't think we could accomplish it. [People were saying], ‘oh, you're going to have to raise all this money’. But when you look at it, it's like \$700,000. And [it was possible] because I'm a grant writer, but also because Massachusetts has all these little pots of money that people in New Bedford had never really applied for, and COG helped with that.” *Lee Blake*

Ultimately, the work behind this women-powered initiative, along with the collective work of the community that so closely supported them, stands as a testament to New Bedford’s enduring Black history.



**‘EVERYONE SAW THAT WHAT THEY HAD SAID TO US WAS REFLECTED IN HOW WE WERE BUILDING THE PARK.’**

**BARBARA CONOLLY**

# Our Supporters

## Individual Donors

Ellen Abdow  
Cheryl Alexander  
Molly & John Beard  
Stephanie F. Leonard & Thomas K. Bennett  
Hadley Sharples Berkowitz  
Carole Biewener  
Lucy Borodkin  
Leslie Brayton  
Lucia Droby & Rick Burns  
Linda Burnett  
Susanne & Benjamin Clark  
Darrah Cole  
Cynthia Collins Hinkelman  
Russell A. Cohen  
Mr. Robert Cummings  
Christina Cowan Sym  
Melinda Dillon  
Maureen Doherty  
Terese & Nino D'Urso  
Charlotte Fleetwood  
Sarah Freeman  
Roberta R. Gianfortoni  
Carolyn & Richard Goldhammer  
Ann Schauffler & Stan Griffith  
Heather Heimarck & Jose Rivera  
David Jay  
Judith Katz & Phil Mayfield  
Judy Katz  
Sarabjit Kaur  
Kate Kennan  
Jennifer Kimball  
Chandu Krishnan  
Jean and Jordan Krasnow  
Claire & Charlie Kozower  
Chad LaBombard  
Richard Levitt  
Karen R. Longeteig & Hasan U. Khan  
Glenn Lucas & Alexandra Schweitzer  
Marnie McLagan  
Frances T. McClennen  
Anne McHugh  
Michelle Moon  
Emily Mueller de Celis

Sara Sally Muspratt  
Sally J. Naish  
Herb Nolan  
Jill Nooney  
Maureen O'Brien  
Susan & Michael Opton  
Alice & John Pepper  
Janis Porter  
Heather Pruiksma  
Rebecca Regan  
Reesa Sheryl  
Ellan & Rob Siegel  
Kimberly Simonsen  
Anne Whiston Spirn  
Jill & Michael Stansky  
Jeff Swanson  
Paul Sutton  
Laura Sauter  
Jen Salman  
Edward H. Sonn  
Barbara Thimm  
Lynette Tsiang  
Christine & Stefan Tullius  
Veronika Ward  
Linda & Gary Watzke  
Dale Wilson

## Corporations & Grantmakers

Beacon Hill Garden Club  
Cavicchio Nurseries  
Grow Native  
Howard Vanvleck Foundation  
British Transplantation Society  
Landscape Council  
Lawrence & Lillian Solomon Fund  
Larry Weaner Associates  
Light & Shade Garden Design  
Lucas-Alexandra Schweitzer Family Charitable Fund  
Nellie Leaman Taft Foundation  
New England Biolabs Foundation, Inc.  
New England Grassroots Environmental Fund  
Terrescapes  
The City of Boston  
The Garden Conservancy  
Vectorworks  
Weston Nurseries



# Our Financials

## 2023-2025 Revenue

Foundations & Grants	\$146,562
Individual Contributions	\$54,263
Corporate Contributions	\$8,242
Events & Other	\$2,456
<b>Total 3-year Revenue</b>	<b>\$211,523</b>

## 2023-2025 Expenses

Programs	73%	\$154,264
Administration	16%	\$32,864
Fundraising	12%	\$24,946
<b>Total 3-year Expenses</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$212,074</b>

**\$212,000 invested in community-centered design and designer education in 2023-2025**

**73% directed to programs**

### **Beyond the Numbers: Leveraging Community Expertise**

COGdesign's impact extends beyond its financial resources through the contributions of volunteer landscape architects, community advisors, photographers, community engagement facilitators, communications and web support professionals, researchers, and an active board of directors. These partnerships strengthen every project and expand the reach of every dollar invested in our work.

“

***Creating accessible and equitable opportunities for people to connect with nature brings the health benefits of nature within reach for all.***

Dr. Linda Tomasso

Environmental Health Researcher & COG Supporter

Research Associate, Environmental Health, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health



*Youth community design session at Archdale Playground, 2023*

“

***BHA received a second open space CPA grant for our recent project together and this would never happen without the great community engagement and design provided by COGdesign.***

Dana Dilworth, SPM  
COG Community Client  
Senior Project Manager, Boston Housing Authority

“

***When the landscape architecture firm looked at my portfolio, they were most interested in the Bunker Hill Playground project because their work is at the same community scale. I am very grateful to COG for providing the opportunity.***

Dora Mugerwa,  
COG Landscape Designer  
MLA Candidate (2025), Harvard Graduate School of Design  
Landscape Designer, Klopfer Marton Design Group





# Community Clients & Landscape Designers

## Community Clients & Projects

- Boston Housing Authority
- Boston Outdoor Preschool Network
- Deedee's Cry
- Egleston Square Main Street
- Ellison-Parks Early Education Center
- Every Child Outdoors
- HERO Nurturing Center
- Hyde Square Task Force
- New Bedford Historical Society
- Norwell Unitarian Church
- Second Church, Dorchester
- Temple Emmanuel
- Trust for Public Land
- The Trustees of Reservations

## Landscape Designers & Architects

- Barbara Connelly, Barbara Connelly Gardens
- Farah Dakkak, Weston Sampson
- Sakina Dong, RDLA Associates
- Emily Drury, Northeastern University
- Ray Dunetz, RDLA Associates
- Laura Feddersen
- Courtney Goode
- Shoma Haque, Haque Designs
- Heather Heimarck, Heimarck Design
- G Laster
- Dora Mugerwa
- Kezia Ofiesh, Studio Keziah
- Hannah Osborne
- Fletcher Phillips, MVMA
- Jessy Qui, RDLA Associates
- Marco Sanchez, RDLA Associates
- Katie Smith, Lu-la Studio
- Michelle Urano
- Nelle Ward
- Jiayu Wu
- Sara Brunelle, Lu-la Studio

## Community Partners

- Boston Food Forest Coalition
- Boston Society of Landscape Architects
- Daemon University, IGNITE
- Northeastern University, Department of Landscape Architecture
- Speak for the Trees



Community design session for H.E.R.O. Micro-healing Forest, 2025

# Leadership & Stewardship

## Board of Directors

Hadley Berkowitz, Board Chair  
Christine Tullius, Vice Chair  
Alexandra Schweitzer, Secretary  
Sarabjit Kaur, Treasurer  
Laura Sauter  
Jeff Swanson

## Former Board Members (2023-2025)

Roberta Gianfortoni  
Ricky Guerra  
Jean Krasnow  
Chandu Krishnan  
Anne McHugh  
Ali Torshizi  
Makenzie Wenninghoff

## Advisory Board

Lucia Droby, Co-Founder  
Heather Heimarck  
David Jay  
Sally Muspratt  
Susan Opton  
Mary Ann Nelson  
Cristian Umana

## Pro-bono Professional Support

Daysia Charles  
Liz Luc-Clowes  
Penny Harris  
Anna Hager  
Heather Heimarck  
Richard Levitt  
Gabby Anstey McDonald  
Jen Salman  
Cristian Umana

## Staff

Staci Jasin, Executive Director  
Benjamin Weitz  
Christine Quinby



## Deepening our Roots

Behind every community project is a strong organizational foundation.

Over the past 3 years, COGdesign invested in strengthening governance, partnerships, evaluation, and long-term sustainability, earning Platinum Transparency status through Candid.



# Building community through landscape design



Stay connected with us.



P.O. Box 380124  
Cambridge, MA 02238



[www.cogdesign.org](http://www.cogdesign.org)