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Roxanne Adair, Urban Gardening Coordinator of the Genesee County Land Bank, deposits soil into a sample bag held by Richard Hill-Rowley, UM-Flint associate professor of earth and resource science. The soil testing is part of the plans to turn an abandoned lot next to Hoffman's Deco & Café on Garland Street into an urban garden. The Urban Alternatives House will be used in part as a learning center for UM-Flint students who will be able to tend the garden.

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## Abandoned lot to be turned into urban garden

### Garden will work with Urban Alternatives House, students will tend to garden

**By: Sirius Welch**

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An abandoned lot next to Hoffman's Deco Deli & Café on Garland Street is being developed into an urban garden. An abandoned house on the lot, which is owned by the Genesee County Land Bank, will be developed into a UM-Flint Learning Center with a residential component unrelated to the University as well. It is also known as the Urban Alternatives House.

The garden and learning center will be tied together for students taking classes in the center at the Urban Alternatives House. Students, as well as community members, will tend to the garden.

Roxanne Adair is no stranger to urban gardens, as her work with 120 gardens last year as the Urban Gardening Coordinator of the Genesee County Land Bank shows. "A lot of people do it just as a hobby to have something to do after work that's outside and relaxing and other people do it just out of pure necessity," Adair said.

Adair also works with Edible Flint, which late last year gave a tour of Flint's urban gardens to four packed buses worth of people. The property will use geothermal energy to heat and cool the house and collect solar radiation in an auxiliary building.

"This idea of working on the Urban Alternatives House is sort of both a symbol for the University outreaching in the community and as an example for us to evaluate strategies for renovations of properties and energy efficiency of sustainable living," said Richard Hill-Rowley, UM-Flint associate professor of earth and resource science.

The partners also want to use a hoop house to extend the growing season. “We’ve got a concept,” said Hill-Rowley. “We’re now exploring whether the concept is viable. We’ve got to work with the city because the zoning probably at the moment is not supportive of a hoop house on site.”

Adair said hoop houses aren’t illegal, “you can have one in the city on your own property if you have a primary structure (house).” She said a hoop house is considered an accessory structure, such as a shed and “the zoning laws are unclear on putting up an accessory structure on a vacant lot if there is no primary structure.” The zoning commission takes these on a site-by-site basis, according to Adair.

“We have been fighting for a couple years now to define a hoop house more clearly in the zoning laws. We hope to get there in the near future,” Adair said.

One of the partners of the project is Hoffman’s Deli, which is adjacent to the lot. The owners want to use produce from the garden in their Deli.

“I’m a strong believer of keeping as much of my money as possible in the Flint community,” said Mark Hoffman, co-owner of Hoffman’s Deco Deli & Café. “If every business jumps on board, trying as best they can to keep their money in the community, or surrounding communities, it’s going to help out in the long run.”

“It’s really motivating to be surrounded by so many people in the city that are passionate about Flint instead of hearing a lot of people speak negatively about it,” Adair said.

“The next step is really getting the students on board with what’s available in the community, as far as Flint goes,” Hoffman said. The residential component in the upper floors of the Urban Alternatives House has no relation to the University, and therefore may be rented out to non-students. The garden is expected to start growing food by next year.

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