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## Community Garden Receives Rave Reviews from WRCOG Representatives

A contingent of elected officials and administrators representing communities from the Western Riverside Council of Governments toured Perris recently, walking historic D Street and taking in sites like Mercado Park, the Mercado and Verano apartment complex, the Perris Theatre and the Metrolink Perris Valley Line station.

The tour ended at City Hall, where the visitors got an up-close look at the new community garden, known officially as the Perris Green City Farm Program.

Perris Mayor Daryl Busch, Mayor Pro-Tem Rita Rogers and Assistant Director of Administrative Services Isabel Carlos provided a brief description of the garden and how it fits in with the City's "Live Well Perris" healthy eating active living campaign.

The 20 visitors heaped praise on the community garden and the improvements made to D Street, the avenue next to the railroad line that first breathed life into Perris more than 125 years ago. They used words like "fantastic," "trend-setting" and "way beyond a typical community garden" to describe the green city farm.

The farm program features a variety of innovative and drought-busting growing systems, including hydroponic, aquaponic and aeroponic platforms as well as traditional growing platforms like planter boxes.

The City recently harvested the first crop from the community garden, which included lettuce, kale, tomatoes and arugula.



Perris Assistant Director of Administrative Services Isabel Carlos (right) explains the City's Green City Farm Program to about 20 representatives of the Western Riverside Council of Governments, who visited the community garden May 12.

Busch told the WRCOG representatives—who represent 23 cities and agencies—that projects like the community garden take patience, commitment and teamwork. Busch praised the cooperation of Perris administrators and staff members who worked with elected officials to bring about the garden and improve Downtown Perris.

"We did this one piece at a time," Busch said. "Always keep your eyes on the ball and put the pieces together to make it all work."

Rogers said the City is "very proud of all of our accomplishments, including the community garden."

"Perris is always a leader," she said. "It's always nice to share our best practices with our colleagues."

Carlos said the City has forged partnerships with WRCOG and Eastern Municipal Water District, which provided funding for the garden, and with community groups like the Boys & Girls Club of Perris, local gardeners, businesses like nurseries and landscapers, senior citizens and workforce development specialists. Future plans call for the creation of an amphitheater and classroom area where healthy-cooking demonstrations will be held.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch chats with Jurupa Valley Mayor Laura Roughton, who called the Green City Farm Program an "inspiration" and "beyond impressive."

Jurupa Valley Mayor Laura Roughton said she was "beyond impressed" by the visit to Downtown Perris and saved special accolades for the community garden program.

"This is an inspiration," Roughton said. "This is something I would definitely like to emulate in Jurupa Valley. This is bigger than anything I envisioned. I love it. It's attractive and eye-catching."

Roughton said she would like her city to develop projects like senior and affordable housing units and community parks, like Perris has in recent years. She praised the City for "having a vision of the future while treasuring the past."

Jurupa Valley incorporated in 2011, exactly 100 years after Perris. Roughton said one of the newest cities in Riverside County would do well to learn from one of the oldest.

"There are a lot of exciting things they are incorporating," she said.

Jennifer Ward, Director of Government Relations at WRCOG, said Perris officials have a well-conceived plan to improve the community and "have done a great job in bringing their vision to reality."

"The City's leadership has done a great job," Ward said. "Everyone brings their own unique perspective and goals but in the end you get great results and everybody sees how dynamic those results are."



Jennifer Ward, Director of Government Relations at the Western Riverside Council of Governments, inspects a vertical growing tower at the Perris' Green City Farm Program.

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