

# AARP Wisconsin: Plans to revamp story garden in southside Milwaukee lot wins 'Small Dollar, Big Impact' grant

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**MILWAUKEE, WI** – A proposal by the VIA Community Development Corporation (CDC) to revamp a “story garden” community space in a southside Milwaukee neighborhood lot has been selected to receive an AARP Wisconsin “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grant.

The garden, located on a city lot at the intersection of 29<sup>th</sup> and Burnham Street, was originally created in 2016. Since then, however, between neighbor and staff transition, the garden has been dormant for the past couple of years. VIA CDC, together with local neighbors and Groundwork Milwaukee, plans to reactivate the garden space by building ADA accessible garden beds, purchasing materials to maintain the beds, and adding lighting to the space.

AARP Wisconsin is awarding one grant each month throughout 2023 to projects across the state that are designed to improve communities and make them better places for everyone to live, work and play as they age. Judges selected this project for a \$1,000 grant after reviewing dozens of proposals submitted from all over the state.

“These grants are exactly what the name describes – short-term, low-cost solutions that could have a remarkable impact on the shaping of local communities,” said Amber Miller, Associate State Director of Community Outreach for AARP Wisconsin. “VIA CDC has done remarkable work in Milwaukee, and we’re excited to see the outcome.”

This grant funding will be a catalyst for future activity at the neighbor-led story garden, according to Lisa King, Deputy Director of VIA CDC. “The first wave of investment in this space will be to bring it back to its original glory so that it is welcoming and inviting,” King said. “The next step will be for VIA to continue to work with neighbors to identify other ways to strengthen, beautify, and utilize this space.”

An additional benefit is that this community garden also has a nearby bus stop. By activating, beautifying, and adding lighting to this space, it also increases the safety for those waiting for the bus and who live nearby. The funding will also help support the foundation for future maintenance and care of the space.

This project is a direct result of one of Burnham Park’s block leaders’ direction and involvement. The block leader, in partnership with VIA, will continue to work with neighbors to activate and maintain the space going forward.

Neighborhood walks – led by VIA – are designed to enhance safety and highlight neighborhood assets. During these walks, neighbors, local business owners, and other stakeholders come together to walk through the community and identify goals they have for the blocks. Through one of these walks, residents who live on the block said they hope that by activating the garden they could deter nuisance activity.

“Often times, the focus of a block conversation is related to solving problems in the neighborhood, such as speeding, trash, crime, etc.,” King said. “These block projects shift this focus so neighbors can collaborate with one another in ways that positively impact the community and proactively stymy neighborhood nuisances...Overall, this garden project provides an opportunity for older and newer generations to collaborate across age and language barriers for a common purpose.”

VIA CDC is a nonprofit community development organization that serves Milwaukee’s near south side. Its mission is to be a partner in building strong and healthy neighborhoods where all of us can thrive. VIA cultivates community and neighborhood well-being through housing, economic development, and grassroots leadership development.

“VIA is so appreciative of this AARP grant and look forward to partnering with our

neighbors to bring this lot back to life for the neighborhood to enjoy,” King said.

AARP Wisconsin’s launched its “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grant program in 2020 and is now in its fourth year of helping proposed projects move forward in rural and urban parts of the state.

The Small Dollar, Big Impact grant program is open to some nonprofits and government entities. For more information on the program, visit [www.aarp.org/WIsdbi](http://www.aarp.org/WIsdbi)