

## Richmond Community Gardens

### *“#19- From Dusk to Dawn”*

I am inspired to write this letter in response to the newly enforced Rule #19 at Broad Rock Community Garden. Before we examine the specifics of this particular regulation, let us speak on the rules and regulations set in place to displace and target a specific category of individuals in “low-income” based communities. Signs aren’t solutions for bigger issues and laws do not save people. Love and community save people. Opportunities and safe spaces save people. Responsible politicians and government officials implement policies, laws and bolster systems, that save people.

The value of a community garden established in black and brown communities is not parallel to community gardens centered in suburban and gentrified neighborhoods. What that says to our underrepresented communities is that access to the beauty, peace, and education of a community garden is a “luxury” only afforded to the privileged. In some communities, you have fountains, hammocks, corn hole, a basketball court, a pool, a garden, patios, decks, sheds, etc. People in proximity to these spaces or living in such neighborhoods has access to these amenities at all hours of the day or night. However, you have communities that have little to no access to any of these spaces. You won’t see a patio or apple tree in sight. Furthermore, we have a revolving issue in the community of folks eating out of the trash can or sleeping in the alleyway at night. The issue is not about loitering. The issue is they are victims of a system that never cared for them. There is nothing criminal about trying to survive and find community. The real crime being committed is displacing folks and then labeling them as “criminal” for not having a home. Resources such as the community garden and other safe spaces are necessary to form shelter, fellowship, meditate, and have a conversation.

Rule #19 under Richmond Grows Garden Rules states, “All garden activities must take place between dawn to dusk, i.e. daylight hours only.” The Richmond Police Department raises the accusation that these spaces have given individuals a “safe space” to commune to consume drugs or participate in sex work. Despite the fact these occurrences are not related to 404 E Broad Rock Garden, I would like to explore this idea that the RPD is supposed to protect and serve those who are the most vulnerable in our communities yet, they are treated again, as criminals. “PARK CLOSED AT SUNSET” does not aid sex workers, or victims of substance abuse, it just relocates the issue. “PARK CLOSED AT SUNSET” does not aid sex workers, or victims of substance abuse, it seems to be used to justify over-policing and arbitrary regulations that is already heavy in the community. This is the garden my team and I attend weekly to clean, and provide a free guided meditation session for the community. This garden is an image of beauty, unity, and spirituality. However, the picture being painted by placing these restrictions in quite ugly and a reflection of how we rather impose laws instead of creating conversation and community.

That conversation should look like providing some mental health resources or creative expression outlets that allow folks who walk the streets at night the opportunity to express themselves in an atmosphere they already feel safe in. I propose the name of this initiative be called, "Project Insomniac" for the night owls of the Broad Rock Community with nowhere to go. The City of Richmond has plans to fund renovating a coliseum that may in fact bring more money into our city but a very small portion of that funding could very well assist with this community issue. At what point do we invest in the people of our city instead of the buildings in it. I further propose that if 500 seats worth of funding that would go towards the coliseum were offered to my initiative, my team and I would be overjoyed to create a late-night program to alleviate such concerns about the garden. We would curate a van route that transports individuals to a hot shower, offer a hot meal and a warm bed, provide access to fresh clothing, and potential job opportunities and resources. That is our community's idea of protecting and serving. Protect these individuals from their demons created and fostered by economic isolation and a lack of a social safety net, then serve them in every way that you can. We are open to partnering with the RPD to carry out this mission as well.

In summary, the value of a community garden in a growing black or brown community is not equivalent to the value of such a garden in neighborhoods that have more community resources because of lack of access. People are growing to feel safe here and we should focus on solidifying that safety instead of stripping it away or restricting it. Let's meet people where they are instead of judging them from afar. On Thursday, October 31st, B Lovee LLC will be hosting the first annual Hall-O-Harvest Festival at Broad Rock Community Garden from 6 - 10 p.m. We hope to see you there! We are prepared to express our sentiments and invoke protest if found necessary because of the seriousness and passion of the matter. However, we would prefer to sit down prior to this event to come to an agreement on how we can move forward together, but if that is not an option, understand, we will stand until the very second we feel like moving. All in the name of Lovee.

Be Love,  
B Lovee

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