



Raw Fisher

By Marc Fisher

The Cold Splash of Reality, With A Side of Sizzle

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Can A Garden Cut Crime?

On Capitol Hill, the quickly gentrifying blocks around the [Kentucky Courts housing project](#) are home to ever more people who must wrap their minds around the contradictions between \$700,000 houses and the screaming sirens that indicate another homicide down the street.

As [neighborhood activist Jim Myers and others have chronicled](#), the crew warfare around 14th Street SE has faded only somewhat in the years since well-to-do folks started moving into the area. But efforts to stem the violence have expanded, and now a group of residents has embarked on a project designed to bring the Hill East neighborhood's two worlds closer together.

At 6 p.m. today on a barren parking lot at 13th and C streets SE, residents will gather with Mayor Fenty, D.C. Council member Tommy Wells and Housing Authority Director Michael Kelly to launch [construction of a community garden and park](#) where affluent residents and housing project tenants alike will get plots on which they can grow vegetables and come together over the mysteries and secrets of making green things thrive.

The idea, put together by residents Eric Schwalb and Richard Lukas, is to improve an unsightly lot, create human connections, and put more people out on the street as a deterrent to crime. Lukas says plots in the garden will be distributed to dues-paying members of the community garden project, but the group is also working on a way to assure that Kentucky Courts residents get plots without charge. The garden concept has been [successfully used elsewhere in the neighborhood](#) but this would be the first time a Hill garden was used as an anti-crime device.

Planting tomatoes isn't likely to turn kids away from crew life, but it might help ease some of the tensions between rich and poor and black and white in a neighborhood where longtime residents sometimes feel as if they are being discarded or pushed out. Put that together with former mayor [Anthony Williams' effort to turn Kentucky Courts into a mixed-income community](#), and you start to see a path forward for a place where class conflict too often bares itself in shootings and sirens in the night.

By Marc Fisher | September 12, 2007; 12:34 PM ET

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