



Project Profile:

Green Era Urban Farming Campus

Project Highlights:

Location:	Chicago, Illinois (Auburn-Gresham)
Feed stock:	Food waste
Feedstock intake:	85,000 TPY <i>initially</i> (230 TPD)
Energy Product(s):	Renewable Natural Gas (RNG)
Energy output(s):	~140,000 MMBTU RNG per year
Energy end use(s):	Heating + Transportation Fuel
Other product(s):	Compost from digestate
Other products end-user:	Urban farm at site

Aerial view of the completed facility
(All facility images courtesy of Urban Growers Collective)

Project Overview

The **Green Era Urban Farming Campus** is located on a 9-acre, former Brownfield site in the Auburn-Gresham neighborhood of Chicago's South Side. It will serve as a local hub for renewable energy generation, urban farming, and community programming and education.

The urban project will provide an innovative alternative to landfilling food waste from around Chicago, which will be collected from restaurants, food companies, manufacturers, and residents, and fed into the project's anaerobic digester tank to produce three beneficial products – renewable natural gas (RNG), food grade carbon dioxide (CO₂) for local use, and nutrient-rich compost.

Project partners **Urban Growers Collective**, **Green Era Educational NFP**, **Green Era Sustainability**, and the **Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation** have invested over a decade of grassroots organizing in getting the project built. Funding for the project includes a portion of \$10 million from the Pritzker Traubert Foundation's first Chicago Prize, along with a combination of other grantsⁱ and private investment funds.

The project was also the winner of the inaugural Climate Challenge Cup in the Climate Change Adaptation category at COP26, the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, Scotland.ⁱⁱ

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Erika Allen, Co-founder & CEO – Urban Growers Collective and President of Green Era Educational NFP, said of the potential impact of the project, *“This is true change: a facility that can grow food, create energy, and provide education and inspiration to young people and folks from our communities that are due for multigenerational wealth—all happening within a community that represents the challenges that we’ve been up against for the last 130 years.”*





Nursery



Urban Farm and Greenhouse



Community Education Center

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Carlos Nelson, CEO of Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation, said, *“My family has lived in Auburn-Gresham for nearly 60 years and experienced all of its economic fluctuations first-hand. I am thankful for Urban Growers Collective and Green Era’s promising investment in Auburn-Gresham and can’t wait to see how this ever-giving project will uplift the community as a whole and improve the quality of life for all of my neighbors.”*



Project Components

At the core of the project will be the campus’ **anaerobic digester(s)** which will process approximately 200 tons of food waste daily. There, in an oxygen-free environment heated to ~130 degrees Fahrenheit, colonies of microbes will break down the food waste, producing biogas that is approximately 65% methane and 35% CO₂.

The biogas will be upgraded to pipeline quality for distribution to vehicle fleets for use as a transportation fuel as well as existing natural gas customers by providing a local renewable supply of RNG to make the energy supply system more resilient.

This RNG will be a carbon-negative renewable energy—meaning that its production and use captures more greenhouse gases than it emits.

RNG can be used to:

- Create electricity,
- Provide heating and cooling,
- Create cooking gas for homes and buildings,
- Fuel industrial processes that would normally use fossil fuel gas, or
- Power vehicles with natural gas engines.

For more information on renewable natural gas, see EPA’s resource [“An Introduction to Renewable Natural Gas.”](#)

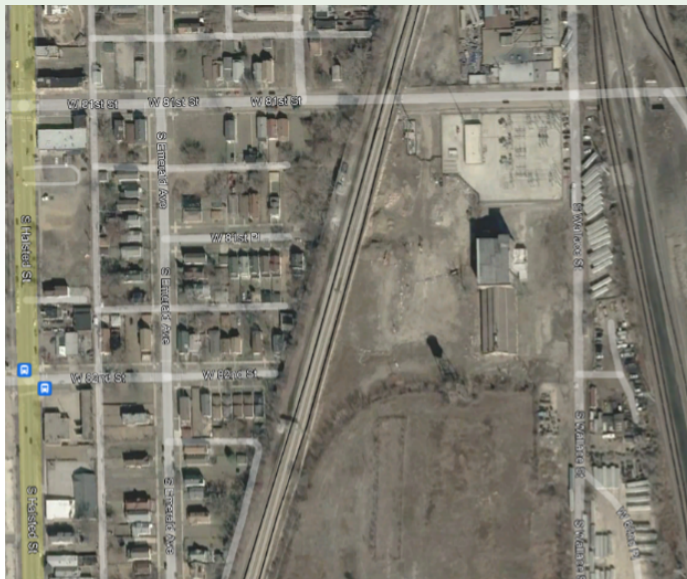
The organic materials left behind in the digesters (“**digestate**”) will be turned into **compost** for use in the Campus’ **Urban Farm and Greenhouse**, and in the community. The produce and herbs grown there will be sold to the community via a retail store, and the facilities will provide training for aspiring urban farmers. With much of Chicago’s soil too contaminated to support local food production, the Campus will also provide compost to other urban farming sites.

Green Era Educational NFP is the site manager for the Green Era Campus as part of a three-way partnership between Urban Growers Collective, Green Era Sustainability, and Green Era Educational NFP. Green Era Educational NFP owns the site and serves as the development entity for the campus. Active engagement of community residents to take a hands-on role in promoting climate mitigation in their own

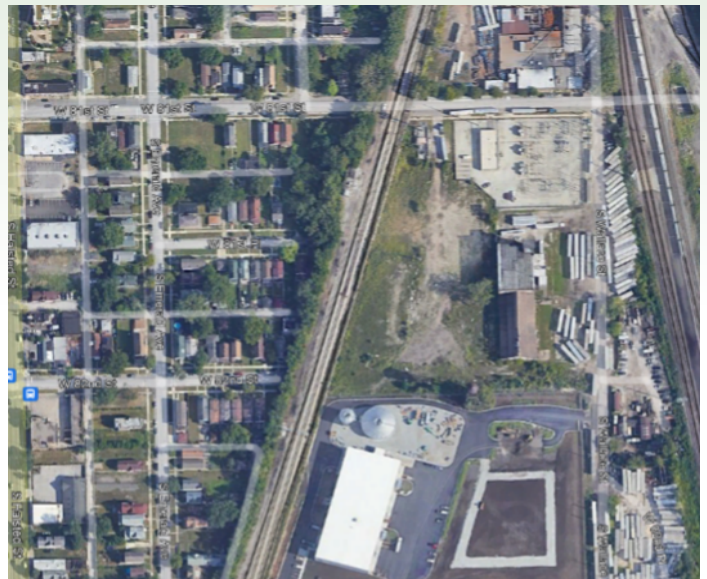
communities has been baked into the entire development of Green Era Campus.ⁱⁱⁱ

Urban Growers Collective will be building and operating a food hub that includes a nursery, a garden center, an urban farm, and a community education center. The Community Education Center will host workshops, training and office spaces, and laboratory facilities for research into local climate change mitigation and storm water management practices.

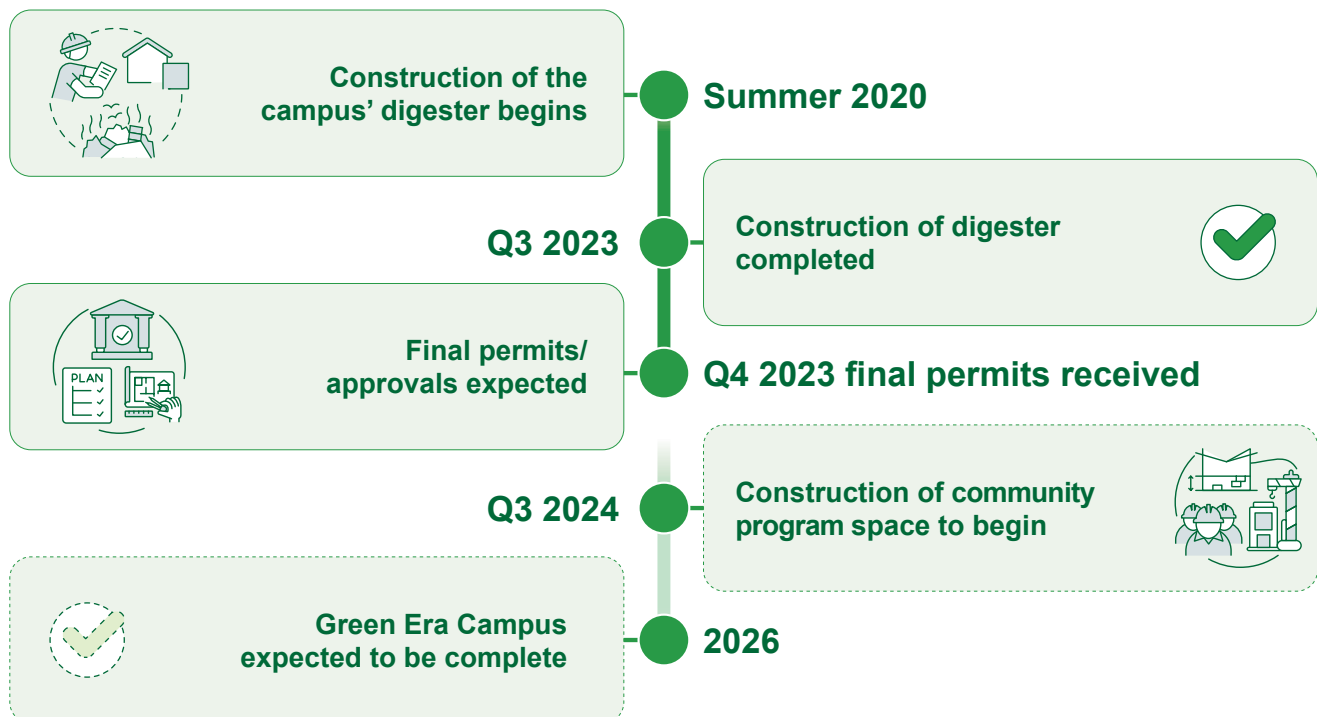
Project Timeline



The site in 2020
(Google Earth)



The site in 2022
(Google Earth)



Project Benefits



People

300+ construction and permanent **jobs created**.

Growing 125+ varieties of produce, including medicinal and culinary herbs.

A source of fresh fruit and vegetables in a neighborhood considered a “food desert”.

Training for young urban farmers and teaching kitchen.

Supporting **new area food business**.

Preventing gentrification and displacement of low-income residents.



Planet

Recycling 85,000 tons of waste annually.

Preventing 42,500 tons of CO₂e emissions every year.

Extending life of nearby landfills, reducing the need for land and expense of developing a new landfill.

Capturing CO₂ which will be used to make food grade CO₂ for bottling drinks, etc.



Profit

Compost, fresh produce, energy, and CO₂.

Retail store profits in turn support continued education/job training and community resources.

ⁱ <https://blockclubchicago.org/2020/08/06/auburn-gresham-project-wins-10-million-prize-from-charitable-foundation/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.fenews.co.uk/skills/inaugural-climate-challenge-cup-winners-announced-at-cop26/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://energynews.us/2022/12/08/on-chicagos-south-side-a-unique-bioenergy-project-helps-fuel-community-connections/>