**Patricia Ohmans  
Frogtown Green  
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The Frogtown neighborhood of Saint Paul sits north of interstate 94, just above University Avenue with its bustling activity, its Green Line light rail trains, and its dazzling array of restaurants. It’s not too far from the State Capitol building and the historic Rondo neighborhood. Patricia Ohmans is among the 50,000 people who live in Frogtown. She’s been there for forty years. She’s seen it change from a mostly white neighborhood - approximately 80% white - to the diversity it hosts today, 38% Asian (Hmong, Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Chinese), 25% white, 22% Black, 9% Latinx, 1% Native American.

Ohmans is a sustainable community advocate and leads Frogtown Green, an organization that plants trees in Frogtown, among other things. They also support Lily Pad Community Garden. Frogtown Green promotes air quality, soil health, and clean water. Ohmans has operated Frogtown Green from her bedroom and kitchen since 2009. She’s quick to point out that there were environmental advocates in Frogtown long before that.

She mentions Frogtown notables Seitu and Sadie Jones and their work to advance the campaign for Frogtown Park and Farm, one of the largest organic urban farms in the country. Frogtown Park and Farm provides vital and vibrant greenspace in a part of the city where greenspace is hard to come by. One neighborhood in Saint Paul, Battle Creek, had 300 times the greenspace Frogtown had before the park and farm broke ground. In 2013, the 13-acre park was created by a grassroots community movement supported by the Trust for Public Lands.

Frogtown is called Frogtown because, back when it was open land, it was a bit marshy. It had a lot of frogs. In their work now, Frogtown Green talks about this history. Why there were frogs, and why they went away. As residents were advocating for the park and farm, they learned that Frogtown has 21% tree canopy. 35% is considered ideal, and some neighborhoods in Saint Paul have 36% and 37% tree canopy. They started to work on ways to plant trees in their neighborhood.

Trees are relatively inexpensive, but getting them started takes some effort. They learned about gravel planting and built a gravel bed to nurture trees to a more resilient age. “We hatched an idea to give trees away,” Ohmans said. “We have donor support, people donate $1800 a year to help Frogtown Green plant trees.” That program is called Free Trees for Frogtown. Sometimes they plant 75 trees a year, but they average about fifty. Since Free Trees for Frogtown’s inception, they’ve planted about 500 trees; 450 are still growing. Last year, Americorps provided a full-time volunteer to help with tree planting.

The program focuses on climate resilient trees; apple, maple, linden, hackberry, planetree, lilac, ironwood, Kentucky coffee tree. As our climate zone has changed, a wider variety of fruit trees can be supported here, so Frogtown Green makes pear, cherry, and a hardy northern variety of peach trees available too.

Frogtown Green’s work is important in and of itself. Trees have inherent value. But their work is especially important because climate change has a disproportionately negative impact on communities of color and neighborhoods without financial wealth. Asthma rates are higher along busy streets and highways. Air pollution requires intentional efforts at mitigation.

Ohmans talked about her progression toward Frogtown Green. “It took me a long time to figure out,” she said. “It took a while for the realities of climate change to kick in. It was a low priority for people. It’s invisible and abstract. It’s so huge you can’t see it. It’s effects are slow and incremental.” She wondered, “why not work on poverty instead?”

Ohmans gradually started to see “our neighborhood is affected by what’s happening globally. Things like that hit Frogtown harder than other neighborhoods. We gradually started to see everything is connected.” They started Lily Pad Community Garden. Frogtown Green has access to a 25,000 square foot lot for demonstrations, and they use it to host seven learning stations hosted by institutional sponsors where they promote local food growing, pollinator gardening, installing systems for compost collection, bicycle commuting, harvesting rainwater, and other steps individual households can take to address climate change. Ohmans started to think about how she could market these approaches in a way that people see more easily. “You can save money by growing your own food.” Frogtown Green is intentional about showing how each of these individual steps helps residents save money, how harvesting rainwater lowers your water bill.

“Frogtown is a neighborhood with many subgroups,” Ohmans said. Frogtown Greens’ gains can be difficult to quantify. She is a proponent of neighborhood-level grassroots advocacy and urges other neighborhoods to do it but to do it in their own way. Greenspace is connected to physical and mental health, and Ohmans believes lives have been changed for the better as a result of their work. “People are happier and healthier. They have an emotional stake in things that affect their lives and livelihood. Residents have easy access to green space now,” she said.

And free trees.