DENVER, COLORADO · ONE ACRE · SITE NOT YET CHOSEN · CONCEPT STAGE

Urban Roots

A community center for growth.

It all starts with a tiny seed. Before long, it's a shared harvest, a local pint, and a neighborhood rooted in looking after one another.

Learn to grow food on one acre in the city, then stay for local beer and live music. Every pint helps keep classes affordable.

Daily operations pay the bills, so the teaching never depends on a grant or a gift. On top of that we go get the rest. Corporate sustainability and giving budgets come through long-standing relationships and a lean, largely automated outreach engine. Add a yearly seed-to-table fundraising dinner for partners, funders and local schools, and a community feast every

THE PLACE 43,560 SQ FT · PLANNED AS ONE LICENSED PREMISES

One acre, one integrated place

Planned for a cheap, overlooked lot near neighborhoods; no site is chosen yet. Farm, classroom and beer garden share one acre. Small bars and carts serve local cans and bottles, wine and spirits, ballpark-style, with no kegs or taps. The site's own food truck, the teaching kitchen, cooks simple, fresh food, and a local guest truck pulls in Thursday through Sunday. A coffee roaster shack by the gate opens the day. A standing open market lets neighbors and makers sell and trade. In winter the pavilion becomes a heated beer hall with a gas fire pit outside, so the site runs all four seasons. Hens, bees, compost and water-wise irrigation close the loop, with solar on the pavilion roof in phase two.

Always something on

EVERY MORNING

A self-care session

Yoga, meditation and mindfulness on the lawn. Then fresh eggs, vegetables and coffee roasted on site.

THURSDAY TO SUNDAY

A guest truck

A different local food truck pulls in beside the teaching kitchen on the busiest nights. More nights follow the crowd.

ALWAYS

An open market

A standing row of stalls where neighbors and local makers sell, swap and trade.

EVERY QUARTER

A holiday market

One big night with local artisans. Free for neighbors to sell or trade.

EVERY QUARTER

A community feast

A big seed-to-table meal for the whole neighborhood.

WHAT WE TEACH HANDS IN THE DIRT · ALL AGES

An educational playground for all ages

Anyone can learn to plant a seed here. Classes, field trips and seed kits are free or low-cost, while camps, workshops and private sessions are paid. The lessons run from the soil to the kitchen to the keyboard.

The family under one roof

Starter Seeds

A free starter seed and a first-grow kit for every kid.

Root Dudes

A kids' video series filmed on site, taking Starter Seeds lessons to anyone, anywhere.

Groundwork Growth

Practical, hands-on digital how-to for adults, from the garden to the keyboard.

Two more pages go deeper: the teaching kitchen, the food truck that cooks and teaches, and closing the loop, the hens, bees, compost and water.

Rooted in neighborhood schools

Urban Roots will grow through partnerships with neighborhood schools, starting close to home in Denver. A school gets an outdoor classroom a short trip away, and Urban Roots gets what it was built for: kids with their hands in the dirt.

In the school day

Field trips to the farm, the greenhouse and the teaching kitchen.

In the classroom

A Starter Seeds kit for every student, and Root Dudes episodes teachers can use.

In the summer

Camps on the acre, with dinner to take home on the days a family opts in.

Around the table

Local schools at the yearly seed-to-table fundraising dinner, and every family at the quarterly community feast.

THE TEACHING KITCHEN THE SITE'S OWN TRUCK · PART OF URBAN ROOTS

The truck that teaches

Simple food. Grown here. Cooked by people getting a second start.

Urban Roots runs one food truck of its own: the site's teaching kitchen. It cooks simple food from scratch, much of it grown steps away in the beds and the greenhouse. The people on the line are learning a trade: people coming home from incarceration, others facing barriers to work, and high-school students in culinary programs. A guest truck from a local vendor parks nearby Thursday through Sunday.

WHAT IT COOKS FROM THE BEDS TO THE WINDOW

Food anyone can afford and everyone can eat

Simple and from scratch

A short menu that one truck can serve fast on a busy Saturday, with something for kids. Fewer items means less waste and faster training.

Grown on the acre

Greens, herbs and vegetables from the teaching beds and greenhouse hit the menu first. Eggs from the site's hens join once the state license for supplying a kitchen is in hand; until then, they sell at the counter.

Priced for the neighborhood

Gardeners on the shared-harvest plots trade produce at the truck for meal credit. Camp families can take home a family dinner at the end of the day.

WHO IT TRAINS A PAID START · WITH PARTNERS

A first job in a real kitchen

Second chances

Paid line training for people coming home from incarceration and others facing work barriers, run in small cohorts. The plan is for a case-management partner to handle job support and for graduates to move on to partner restaurants.

Students

High-school culinary programs, like Colorado ProStart and district culinary pathways, could send students for farm-to-window shifts: the whole chain from seed to plate in one place.

Everyone else

Field trips and camps see the kitchen at work; public workshops teach knife skills, preserving and cooking what you grow. Every meal served is also a lesson in where food comes from.

HOW IT WORKS ONE TRUCK · ONE KITCHEN ENTITY

Owned by the site, run as a training kitchen

The founding campaign buys and equips the truck, leasing it to a separate teaching-kitchen entity that runs the menu, trainees and books. This kitchen passes a share of sales back to the site. As the site's own kitchen, its food sales run through the program.

The truck parks on a pad off the service drive, its window facing the beer garden. The plan uses the site's kitchen space as its licensed base, pending city confirmation.

In the working model (Base)

- One truck, with a check that it keeps up on a peak summer Saturday, even at a slow pace.
- Truck and equipment: about $60,000 (range about $48,000 to $80,000), funded in the founding campaign.
- The kitchen passes about 12% of its sales back to the site (range 9% to 15%), after food, trainee wages, fuel and its base.
- No tax credit is counted: the federal hiring credit for people with a record lapsed at the end of 2025, and a nonprofit cannot claim it for those hires.

WHO HAS DONE THIS FIVE PROGRAMS

Proven elsewhere, never on sales alone

PROGRAM	WHAT IT DOES	WHAT IT SHOWS
Work Options, Denver	Culinary training with case management; runs the Helping Hen cafe and food truck	More than 3,200 people trained since 1997; graduates intern on the truck
Comal Heritage Food Incubator, Denver	A restaurant that trains immigrant and refugee women in the food business	$650,000 paid to participants by 2020; current status unconfirmed
Drive Change, New York	Started as a food truck for young people coming home from jail	A truck holds about four people at once; it later moved to restaurant placements
Café Momentum, Dallas	A restaurant run by paid interns aged 15 to 19, with case management	Up to 80 young people a year at one site
Homeboy Industries, Los Angeles	Bakery, diner and other businesses plus services	About a third of its revenue comes from its businesses

From published sources read Oct 14, 2026: 5280, the Colorado Trust, RSF Social Finance, Café Momentum and Homeboy Industries' 2024 annual report. Nobody was contacted.

The lesson: a truck works best as one station in a bigger program, with partners handling case management. Urban Roots plans it this way.

WHAT HAS TO BE TRUE BEFORE IT OPENS

Questions for the right people

Food safety

Can the site's teaching kitchen serve as the truck's licensed base, and what does the state require before the truck cooks the site's own eggs and honey?

Structure

How the kitchen entity is set up and how its share reaches the nonprofit: a question for an accountant and a lawyer.

Partners

Which training and case-management partner, which schools, and which restaurants take graduates.

Closing the loop

Low-cost pieces that teach the most, and a farm that eats its own cooking.

Kitchen scraps become compost, compost feeds the beds, and beds feed the kitchen. Hens turn scraps into eggs and manure, bees pollinate and make honey, irrigation waters only what plants need, and the pavilion roof is drawn for solar. Each piece is cheap to add, serving as a lesson rather than income, barely touching the bottom line.

THE LOOP HOW IT FITS TOGETHER

Nothing leaves the acre that can stay on it

THE PIECES FIVE STATIONS · EACH ONE A CLASS

What each piece is, and what it teaches

Hens

About 25 hens in a coop and run under the trees on the east lawn. Their eggs sell at the counter; their manure goes into the compost. Kids learn where breakfast comes from.

▸ Sources

Bees

Two hives sit in the quiet west strip behind a flyway hedge, lifting bees above head height before they cross the beds. This brings more pollination, a bigger harvest and second-year honey at the counter.

Denver's rules allow 2 hives a lot, set back from the property lines with a 6-foot flyway barrier.

Compost

Three turning bays, two winter-ready insulated hot boxes, and classroom worm bins sit in the service yard. Scraps from the bars, truck and events go in; finished compost returns to the beds.

▸ Sources

Water

Drip lines in every bed and the greenhouse run via a smart controller and soil-moisture sensors. A two-barrel display by the wash station teaches visitors home rain collection.

Solar PHASE TWO

The pavilion's south roof is drawn for about 12 kW of panels. Installed when Denver's nonprofit solar program or a donated, crew-built install pays for it, it teaches energy like the beds teach food.

▸ Sources

THE MONEY BASE CASE · WORKING MODEL OF NOV 14, 2026

Cheap to add, light on the bottom line

Eggs and honey roughly pay for the birds and bees. Savings on hauling and water cover the rest, so the loop adds a little to the year rather than costing it, earning its place through education.

~$12k

to build the coop, hives, compost program, controller and rain-barrel display

~$500

added a year to the site's result, after costs and tax

$0

for solar until a program or donated install pays for it

ON THE SITE PLAN ZONES 16 TO 19 · SOLAR ON THE PAVILION, ZONE 5

Where it sits on the acre

See these on the site plan →

ZONE	WHY IT SITS THERE
5 Pavilion, phase two south roof drawn for solar	The largest south-facing roof on the site.
16 Chicken coop and run ~25 hens	Under the trees on the east lawn for summer shade, beside the shared-harvest plots and an easy walk from the compost.
17 Bee yard 2 hives · flyway hedge	The quiet west edge of the teaching beds, away from the beer garden and the play area.
18 Compost program 3 bays · 2 hot boxes · worm bins	In the service yard, where scraps arrive and finished compost leaves without crossing the teaching area.
19 Rain-barrel display 2 barrels, not on a downspout	By the wash station, where every class passes.

WHAT HAS TO BE TRUE BEFORE IT IS BUILT

Questions for the right people

Zoning

Does the chosen lot allow a flock of about 25, two or more hives and composting on site?

Food safety

The state egg license for the truck, and whether the site's honey sells under the state's cottage-foods rules or its own retail license.

Energy

Whether the city's nonprofit solar program has money open, and what a crew-built install would cost.

ARTS AND STAGE OPEN SPACE · CHEAP TO RENT · BUILT TO TEACH

Bring your class. We keep the room cheap.

The pavilion and its stage are an open studio. Local instructors rent it for next to nothing and bring their own students: violin one night, improv the next, yoga on the lawn in the morning. The same stage carries plays and stand-up.

MUSIC

Violin to full band

Lessons and ensembles from working local musicians, on a real stage.

THEATER AND COMEDY

Plays, improv, stand-up

Local troupes and comics rehearse, teach and perform on the same stage.

SOUND, LIGHT AND VIDEO

Hands on the board

Mix a live band. Light a room. Run cameras and a live stream.

VENUE AND BAND MANAGEMENT

Run the night

Book the act, set the stage, work the door, strike it down.

YOGA AND MEDITATION

Morning on the lawn

A daily self-care session: yoga, meditation and mindfulness.

Why the rent stays low

Cheap space keeps teachers teaching. Their students meet the place and stay for a drink or a bite. Local bands and artists get the stage and the walls. The room never sits dark.

A place that pays its own way

Urban Roots isn't quite a farm, a school or a beer garden. It puts all three on one acre and lets each do what it does best. The farm and classroom are why it exists. Drinks, food and events pay for it, so the teaching stays affordable and never waits on the next grant.

We practice what we teach. The everyday tools taught in the garden also run the background work: research, grant drafts, bookkeeping, outreach and this page. This keeps the team small and costs low, with a person reviewing every piece.

> *Self-sustaining through lifelong learning and community.*

Where the money comes from



Earned income in a steady year, by design. The rest is summer camps, classes, memberships, markets and plant sales.

- Operations pay the bills. Built to stay in the black on its own, all four seasons.
- Partners, digital and giving add to it. Corporate programs, Root Dudes and Groundwork Growth, a seed-to-table fundraising dinner and donors. Never counted on.
- Grants pay for growth. Pursued constantly. They speed up the next site.

One acre that works all day, all year

BY DAY

Classes, camps, field trips and the garden itself.

BY NIGHT

Local beer, simple food, live music and private events.

ALL WINTER

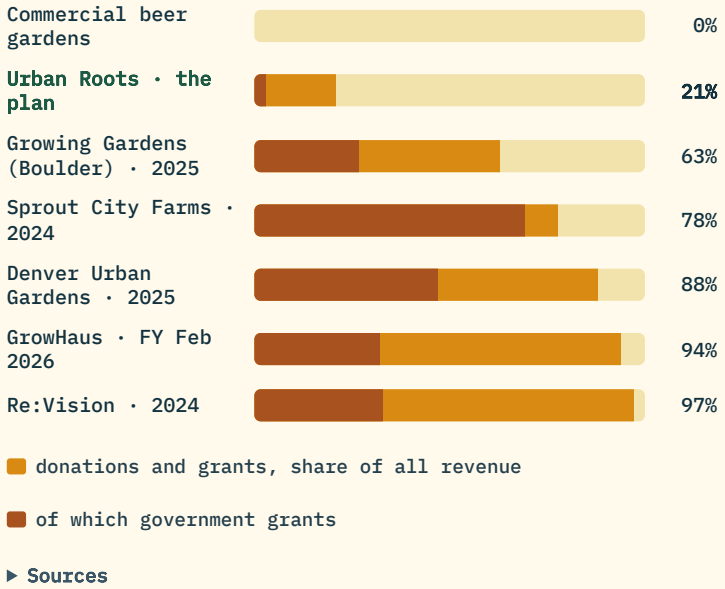
The pavilion closes into a heated beer hall, so the acre earns in every season.

SIX DAYS A WEEK

The same ground, the same small team, open all year.

How much of the revenue comes from gifts

Denver's urban farms and gardens do great work, mostly running on gifts, which risks the teaching when grants dry up. Beer gardens run on sales alone. Urban Roots sits between the two on purpose.



▸ Sources

What beer gardens sell

The earning side is an established kind of business. This shows a year of alcohol sales across 38 Texas beer gardens from a public venue-by-venue data set. Sales, not profit.

TYPICAL	TOP QUARTER
~$535k	**$1.58M+**
the median	and up
LARGEST	
$3.6–4.5M	
the biggest venues	

Closer to home, the nonprofit concert venue Levitt Pavilion Denver generated about $1.39M at its bar and concessions in 2023, with product costs around 21%. Our plan's drink sales sit between the typical beer garden and the top quarter.

THE BUILD BLUEPRINTS · ONE GC · A LOCAL CREW

Frugal, lasting, and built to be copied

No premium finishes or kits. A general contractor oversees licensed trades while a core local crew builds from step-by-step recorded plans. They learn to repair every piece and move on to lead the next site. The build itself is education.

Materials are cost-effective, safe and lasting, bought in bulk where it makes sense and local wherever possible.

How the build is run

Record everything
The whole build is captured step by step, on video and in the plans.

Review it every night
People and AI tools go through the day's footage together to find what to do better tomorrow.

Keep a living plan
The plans are a working model, updated as the crew learns, so every step can be repeated.

Fit the next place
Each new site adjusts to its own community, lot and risks, built on what the last site taught.

The construction team

ONE GENERAL CONTRACTOR

Oversees the licensed trades and answers for the work.

A CORE LOCAL CREW

Local hires who build the site, learn to repair every piece of it,

EXPERIENCE PLUS MODERN TOOLS

Seasoned builders make the calls. Digital tools carry the planning,

HOW WE GOT HERE YEARS OF GROUNDWORK · ONE SHARED RECORD

Years in the making

Urban Roots didn't start in one place. It started in a garden with my dad, growing up, and again in a Denver backyard in 2020, when the world felt like it was tilting. It grew from what AI means for how we learn and work, from watching social media spread misinformation, from a family of educators, and from a son who wanted to dig in the dirt. And it grew from a simple need: somewhere outside where kids can move and learn safely while the grown-ups have a drink and some fun. — Ben Johnson

520
past conversations, plus notes and email, gathered into one record

129
dated sources behind the numbers

3,589
live formulas in the working model

The working method behind this page is laid out at benallenjohnson.com.

The groundwork

In the garden
Growing food at home through Denver's short season and thin air, composting, and learning what works, season by season.

With people already doing it
Community-garden workshops, and a father who was a horticulturist with his own small business.

On camera
The first Root Dudes footage, shot in the garden: kids learning to grow through story. It now sits under Starter Seeds.

On paper
Years of notes, sketches and conversations working out what Urban Roots is, who it serves and how it pays for itself.

Pulled together
The research, model, site plan and this page are assembled with digital tools, focusing time on the people

From a model to a place

The concept holds together on paper. Opening is roughly two years out: a year of gathering real data with business operators, then a year to build. The work replaces estimates with evidence, builds the partner circle, and gets it ready to travel.

PROVE IT

Turn estimates into evidence

GROW IT

Build the community that keeps it running

Partners who share the wealth

Local farms, makers and businesses as partners: shared events, sourcing and cross-promotion that bring traffic in both directions.

Giving built on relationships

A corporate program modeled on partners-in-education runs lean through working relationships, including an existing ESG reporting and consulting network. The whole team helps tell the story.

Schools as the root

Work out the partnership with the schools nearest the site, starting close to home.

SPREAD IT

Reach past one acre

The next markets

A high-level look at which cities fit the model and what a second site needs, so the blueprint is ready to travel.

Root Dudes and media

Research the digital side: a Root Dudes YouTube channel, short-form video and a low-cost unscripted series pitch for streaming.

EARLY NUMBERS THE MIDDLE CASE, NOT A FORECAST

Who comes, what they spend, what it takes

A working model sits behind this page: three cases, 219 inputs and 129 dated sources. These are its middle case in a steady year. Opening is roughly two years out, and the first year goes to replacing estimates with real numbers from operators, restaurant owners and contractors.

TO BUILD ONE ACRE
~$1.17M
middle case, before contractor bids · low $0.8M, high $1.9M

GUESTS A DAY TO BREAK EVEN
~123
on what the site earns itself · the plan assumes 163 · about 68 with partners and giving

DRINKS, FOOD AND EVENTS
~85%
of earned income, by design

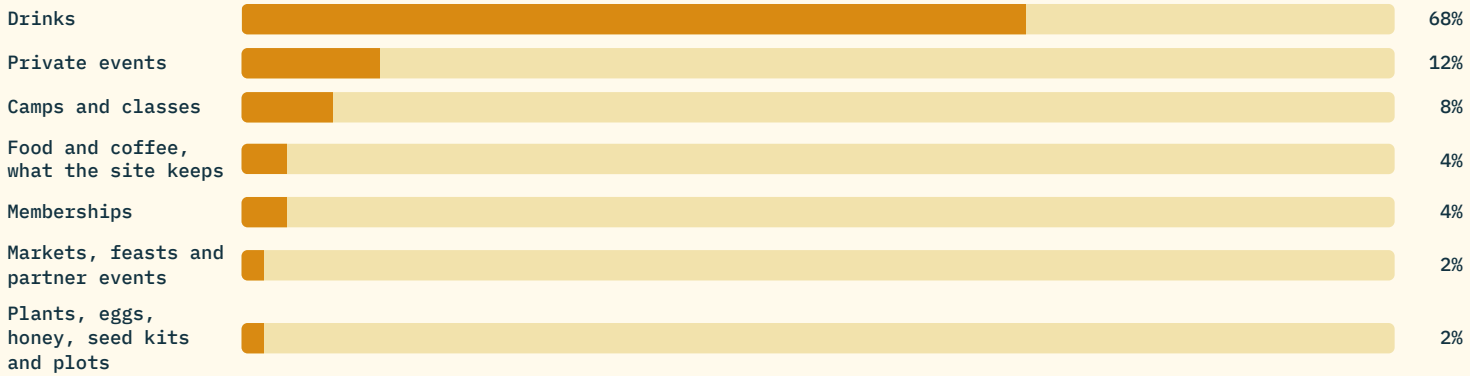
OPEN
6 days a week
all year

Who comes, and what they spend

Families out for the day	about 17,400 visits a year	about $18 a head, kids counted
Adults out socially	about 22,400 visits a year	about $29 a head
Music-night guests	about 10,000 visits a year	about $42 a head
Class and camp visitors who stay	about 1,300 visits a year	about $15 an adult, after a class or pick-up
Morning visitors	about 10,700 visits a year	about $6 for coffee and a bite
Private-event guests	about 3,600 visits a year	about $30 a head at the bar

Spend is drinks plus food from the teaching kitchen; for morning visitors it is coffee and a bite at the shack. The snack cart adds about $1.75 a family guest. How many parents stay after a class, and how many people come for morning coffee, are first guesses until real counts replace them.

Where the earned income comes from



Shares of earned income in a steady year. Food and coffee count only what the site keeps: the teaching kitchen's margin, the guest truck's fee, the snack cart and the coffee shack after its own costs.

Operations

Drinks, food, events, memberships, camps, classes, markets and plant sales, all four

+ Partners, digital and giving

Corporate partners, our digital channels, an annual seed-to-table fundraising dinner and individual

+ Grants

Pursued constantly, never needed to stay open. They speed up the next site.

What still needs real data

Guest counts by season at a real site, morning coffee traffic, how many class and camp visitors stay, contractor bids, local partner and corporate program commitments, and the license path. Until then, these are planning figures.

Counted since October: the guest food truck, the snack cart, open-market stalls, the quarterly holiday market and community feast, shared-harvest plots, instructor classes, and now the coffee roaster shack and the morning session.

Go deeper

Full concept, with the interactive plan and early numbers: benallenjohnson.com/urban-roots/

One-pager on the web: benallenjohnson.com/urban-roots/one-pager.html

Print one-pager: benallenjohnson.com/docs/garden/urban-roots-one-pager-2026-11-14.pdf

This deck: benallenjohnson.com/docs/garden/urban-roots-deck-2026-11-14.pdf

Figures are early planning figures from a working model and will change as real data comes in. License, zoning, structure and tax questions are open and not yet put to professionals. This deck is not a solicitation or an offer.