

# The Secret Ingredient of a Thriving Neighbourhood

By Preston Pouteaux

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When gardens thrive, you know it. You can smell the aroma of sweet peas, you can see the lively buds and blossoms, you can feel the thick green grass between your toes, and here and there you can hear the buzz of bees and the chirping of song birds. It might take a seasoned green thumb to explain exactly how a garden became so healthy, but anyone can tell if a garden is thriving, or not.

Knowing when our city or neighbourhood is thriving might be a bigger challenge. How do we measure vitality in our neighbourhoods? At first glance, almost every neighbourhood looks the same. They have houses, cars might be coming and going, there may be buildings and parks dotted throughout. Yet people instinctively know when their city is thriving, or not.

Recently I was visiting another community and I spent some time speaking with locals. It became clear to me that they felt their neighbourhood was not thriving. They told me about how people didn't connect, how community groups were closing down, and I left with a sense that something had knocked the wind out of them. Although they could not put their finger on it what was missing from their community, they knew that their neighbourhood was not thriving.

Here's a gardening secret. The trick to gardening is "attentive faithfulness." You won't find this term in gardening books, but all the best gardeners stand with this posture. Here's what it looks like: firstly, they pay attention to their garden, the soil, the weather and the seeds. They study the ground and the sun and find the very best places to plant. Their keen eyes see gardens as more than a jumble of plants, but as a thriving, dynamic living world. Gardeners are masters of seeing the unseen, of paying attention to the tiny clues around them. Secondly, gardeners are faithful. They stick it out for the whole season, year after year. When others have called it a day, gardeners are putting on their boots and getting their hands dirty. They create watering schedules and know when to move tender potted plants outside. They respond to their garden and, in a sense, grow with it. When a problem comes up, the best gardeners don't just cut down a bush or spray chemicals over their garden, they work to understanding it first, they take all that they've seen and find creative solutions. Under the care of an attentive and faithful gardener, life emerges.

This inherent posture of the best gardeners is the secret to a healthy, thriving neighbourhood. Those who care for their neighbourhoods well are

those who stand with a posture of “attentive faithfulness” to the world around them. They pay attention to the people, the kids, the dog park and the community groups. They study the challenges and look for those little corners where good things are happening. They have eyes to see their city as more than rows of houses, but as a dynamic, complex, and beautiful community worth investing in. Neighbourhood enthusiasts are also those who are faithful. They find ways to encourage community, gather people, and cheer on goodness. When they see a chance to bring life, they work together with others to make their neighbourhood thrive.

At the hands of attentive and faithful people like you and me, neighbourhoods can thrive. And when a city thrives, you know it.

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