

# SEEDS begin to blossom in new building

*The renovations include sustainable energy designs, open space and a basement.*

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Staff Writers

After a three-month delay, staff and volunteers of Durham's 20-year-old community garden, SEEDS, moved into its newly renovated building last week.

SEEDS, a non-profit educational community garden, is still located on the corner of Gilbert and Elizabeth Streets, but in a new, user-friendly building.

Plans for renovations were set in place for nearly four years. Main construction began in April 2013, and all renovations will be finished by mid-February.

Executive Director Emily Egge said last summer's heavy rains slowed down exterior demolition.

"Digging in the ground and pouring concrete is not possible when it's raining," she said.

Some of the building's new features include a solar-powered hot water heater, low-flow fixtures, LED lighting, a large kitchen and a new rainwater collection system.

"We're collecting all the rainwater from the roof through two cisterns that were recently put back into the garden," Egge said. "We have the goal of not using city water for our garden."

The organization also received many donations. Durham Academy donated recycled maple flooring from its gym floor, which is now in the building's main space. Durham restaurant Parker and Otis donated their three-compartment sink for the new kitchen.

To help connect the space with the garden, Egge said they installed large windows across the entire front of the building.

"We tried to incorporate those kinds of things that just are going to make it a welcoming, friendly place to be," Egge said.

"Make it a low maintenance space because we want to be able to focus on our programming and not maintaining our building."

Closeness to the garden was a major goal in the design of the new building.

"The open space is important because



**Garden manager Hilary Nichols sorts through packets of seeds in building's largest space. The space would not only give staff more room, but also allow for more community engagement. (Staff photo by Kaitlyn Knepp)**

it helps the young farmers become more connected with the garden," said Chef Kabui, who has volunteered with SEEDS for four years.

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Emily Egge

Executive director of SEEDS

"The young farmers get to see what they grew while eating."

Kabui also said he could not prepare food as he pleased in the old building because of the space.

"I use a lot of SEEDS' produce," said Kabui. "I stop to their garden first before heading to markets."

In addition to the building's renovations, the gardens will also see a few changes in the garden design.

Garden manager Hilary Nichols said about 40 to 50 feet of garden space around the building was torn up by construction.

**SEEDS is looking for volunteers.  
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[seedsnc.org](http://seedsnc.org)**

Nichols said she hired a permaculture designer to gather input from the staff, neighbors and volunteers about their visions for the garden. After collecting their ideas, a permaculture design class at North Carolina State University created 14 potential designs.

The SEEDS design council will vote on a final design in the next few weeks. Work on the new design should start at the end of February, Nichols said.

"We're trying to make sure that everybody involved at SEEDS has some input into what the garden design is and that it's going to work a lot better than the old one did," she said.

Nichols said the new space she is most excited about is the basement. Since the old building did not have one, tools had to be stored in Nichols' office.

"It's not fun to have a computer and shovels in the same office," she said.

Nichols said she would build a connection between the garden and the new building by working with volunteers in the kitchen.

"I'm trying to incorporate more and more eating and food experience in with the volunteer experience," she said.

"People come, work in the garden, and then get to taste a little something to kind of show what their work goes into."