

Dig it! A Practical Toolkit

How local governments can support community gardens



Winter 2009

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Thanks to Jared Wright, Union of BC Municipalities, and Tatiana Robertson, Ministry of Community Development

- What has the local government already done to support community gardens? (Check, for example, with the Parks Department).
- Note existing strategies and initiatives that are naturally aligned with community gardens (affordable housing, food security, transportation and greenways, economic development).

4. Build understanding and a case

- Find champions/resource people -- councillors, staff, and individuals inside and outside government.
- Based on steps 1 and 2, work with champions to develop a case for local community gardens (see Chapter 4 on *Benefits* and *Communication tools* below).
- Bring ideas forward to Council.

5. Build support, momentum and a vehicle

- Continue to work alongside your champion(s).
- See if staff are interested in establishing a community gardens subcommittee. This committee could be in one department or, preferably, cut across a number of departments.
- Engage residents, participants and other stakeholders in determining priorities for creating community gardens or community garden programs.

6. Next steps

- Conduct a survey to better understand the current situation. How many gardens are there -- waiting lists, areas with active interest in establishing gardens, etc?
- Survey and map potential sites, vacant lands, unique places, schools and community centres.
- Work with the community to provide recommendations to local government for community garden policies and implementation plans.
- Build an array of partnerships and resources to move the process forward.
- See Chapter 7, Checklist #2: "Digging In" -- *10 Steps to Starting a Community Garden*

CHECKLIST #2 - DIGGING IN: 10 STEPS TO STARTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

This fact sheet provides information on how to start a community garden. It is adapted from the American Community Garden Association's *Starting a Community Garden Guide* (<http://www.communitygarden.org>), and emphasizes the roles that local governments can play in the process.^{vii} It is not meant to be a complete list and

^{vii} The Community Gardening Network of Ottawa has also produced a 47-page guide for community members getting started on a community garden. http://www.spcottawa.on.ca/ofsc/en/community_garden_network.asp



the steps do not necessarily occur in sequence; rather, it offers ideas to be used as a resource for developing individual gardens.

The key role for local government staff is *supporting* the community process, as the community of gardeners and organizations takes the lead in creating and maintaining the garden. This approach will help to build greater community ownership and stewardship of the garden over the short- and long-term.

1. ORGANIZE A MEETING OF INTERESTED PEOPLE

Bring together the key people who are interested in a garden in order to determine if a garden is needed and, if so, what type of garden is wanted, and who it will serve. Invite neighbours, tenants, community organizations, gardening groups, and other interested persons. If the project is meant to benefit a particular group or neighbourhood, it is essential that this group be involved in all phases of development.

Local government role: Participate in the meeting, offer space for the meeting, and help to get the word out. It is important to ensure that community members take the lead in facilitating the meeting. Their buy-in and ownership is critical from the outset.

2. FORM A PLANNING COMMITTEE

Individuals, groups and supporting partners come together to discuss the development of the garden. Select a well-organized leadership team, and create communications protocols and a central contact number. Make a list of things to be done and consider forming committees in areas such as funding and resource development, youth activities, construction, and communication

Local government role: Provide staff time to participate, a staff person who acts as a liaison and contact point with the city, attend planning meetings, offer meeting space, and provide information on how local government can support the development process.

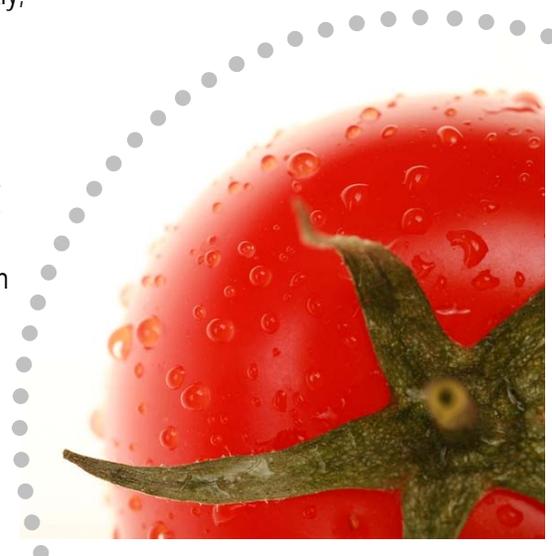
3. IDENTIFY RESOURCES AND APPROACH SPONSORS

A wide range of resources are available in the community and private sector. Contributions of land, tools, seeds, fencing, soil amendments, and finances are all vital. Churches, schools, citizen groups, private businesses, and local parks and recreation departments are potential supporters. Recognition of sponsors is important. Keep a list of sponsors and ensure that transactions are transparent.

Local government role: Local governments can provide expertise, planning support, public consultation support, links to supportive organizations, and seed funds for garden supplies, tools, and materials such as soil, woodchips, etc. Most importantly, they can provide access to land for both provisional (short-term) and long-term gardens.

4. CHOOSE AND SECURE A GARDEN SITE

There are many considerations when choosing a site: soil, sun, slope, water, size, location, ease of access, parking, and proximity to the areas where gardeners live and/or work. Gaining access to a site may require you to: generate support, document garden plans, anticipate landowners' questions and concerns, approach the landowner, meet with appropriate staff, advisory committees and council, and



negotiate the terms of the lease. It is important to continue to communicate with neighbours, seek their input, and work together to overcome concerns.

Local government role: Conduct an inventory of land in the local jurisdiction for potential garden sites. Include parkland, easements, land around facilities, and vacant local government-owned lots. The BC Government has historically provided Crown land to local governments to support public purposes. Where possible, this land has been provided at less than market value through a Crown Grant or Nominal Rent Tenure (see Chapter 5).

5. PREPARE AND DEVELOP THE SITE

In most cases, the site will need considerable preparation before planting. This stage of the process provides an opportunity to engage with a wide range of community members. Volunteers will be critical. After site clean-up, users and those with relevant experience will need to develop a garden design. Locations must be chosen for tool storage, bulletin boards, and signage. Decisions must be made on a variety of issues: How will plots be laid out? Will there be a gathering area? A children's garden? Where will compost be stored? Organize work parties and start the work.

Local government role: Municipal staff can provide expertise in garden design, access to water, materials and resources, and horticultural expertise. Seed funding for garden start up can help kick start gardens and leverage other resources.

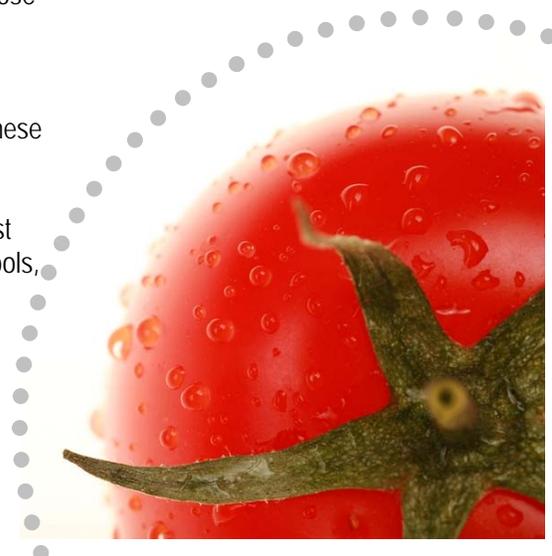
6. CREATE THE GARDEN GUIDELINES AND WRITE DOWN THE RULES

Members and partners must decide how they want to manage the garden. When gardeners develop the guidelines themselves, they will know what is expected and be more likely to follow the rules. Guidance will be required on: conditions for membership, plot assignments, fees, cooperative obligations (e.g., turning in soil at the beginning of the season, composting), meetings and communications, shared tools and equipment, and maintenance responsibilities. Develop a set of written rules which gardeners and guests are expected to uphold, with clear agreed-upon consequences for non-compliance.

Local government role: Local governments can offer support to organizations that help gardener groups undertake this process. They may also have staff with experience in this area. Gardens have a much better chance of success if these types of details are discussed and agreed upon in advance.

7. SET UP A NEW GARDENING ORGANIZATION OR WORK WITH AN ESTABLISHED ENTITY

Many garden groups are organized very informally. However, because gardening groups often enter into leasing agreements and hold insurance, many groups choose to form a gardening organization or are supported by an umbrella organization. A formal structure helps to ensure that gardens are accessible to all and that activities are transparent. Good choices include environmental or community development groups, neighbourhood associations, and religious organizations. These groups will have a legal identity, board of directors, an accountant and insurance. Most organizations will require a clear picture of garden activities, details on how decisions are made, codes of conduct, and provisions for safety. Agreements must be made concerning communication, recognition, accounting, and ownership of tools, buildings and fixtures.



Local government role: Staff with experience and understanding of this process can be a real asset. It is useful to provide information pertinent to the choice between partnering with established organizations and creating a new organization. In some cases, local governments will choose to cover community gardening activities under their own insurance policies. This is a great support for small gardening groups, and in areas where no organizations provide this type of support.

8. MANAGE YOUR COMMUNITY GARDEN

It is important that community garden groups make agreements about procedures for the ongoing maintenance of the garden, including which areas of the garden are assigned to groups and which will be used by individuals. Written rules spell out exactly what is expected of gardeners, and make it much easier to avoid problems, and to deal with them when they do arise.

Local government role: While garden groups usually conduct the majority of garden maintenance, in some cases local governments can support ongoing operations and maintenance by supplying water and materials and maintaining pathways or the perimeter of the garden.

9. HELP MEMBERS KEEP IN TOUCH WITH EACH OTHER AND THE SURROUNDING COMMUNITY

Good communication ensures a strong community garden with actively participating members. Help tools include: a rainproof bulletin board with garden info and contact numbers, garden signage, a newsletter, an email list serve, and a phone tree.

Local government role: Designate one staff person to be the point person for communications, to distribute information to staff and Council, and to communicate with gardeners as needed.

10. CELEBRATE!

Make sure to celebrate your successes. Bring together all partners and individuals to recognize their efforts and contributions. These types of gatherings show everyone who is involved, encourage people to get to know each other through positive experiences, and help build the relationships necessary to work through any problems that arise.

Local government role: Join in! Communicate successes to the appropriate staff and Council. Nominate community leaders for citizenship awards.

