



**CITY OF VICTORIA**

**COMMUNITY GARDENS POLICY**

**September 2005**

## **Policy Definition**

The City of Victoria recognizes community gardening as a valuable community recreational activity that contributes to health and well-being, positive social interaction, community development, environmental education, connection to nature, protection and use of open space and economical, nutritious food production and food security. The City of Victoria encourages community gardening by collaborating with existing non-profit groups in the development of community gardens. This policy primarily applies to public lands and has provisions for private land.

For the purposes of this policy, a “community garden” is defined as: a plot of land where community volunteers from a non-profit society produce food, flowers, native and ornamental plants, edible berries and food perennials on public or private lands. A community garden program may have the following features:

- Promotes urban agriculture, food security and food production. \*
- Utilizes a parcel of land in order for the society to : produce organic vegetables, fruit and flowers for the use of its members through allotments or shared plots, and can be an ornamental, native plant and perennial food producing garden for community enjoyment.
- Provides demonstration gardening and other environmental education programs to encourage the involvement of schools, youth groups and citizens (who do not have assigned plots) in gardening activities.
- Provides to society members plots and services such as water, tilling and shared tools usually in exchange for a fee or volunteer labour exchange.
- Compost bins, tool storage sheds and other elements necessary for the operation of a community garden.
- Ensures that the public have access to the community garden areas
- Donates surplus produce to local food banks
- Encourages partnerships with other community organizations
- Provides compost bins, tool storage sheds and other elements necessary for the operation of a community garden

## **Goals of a Policy for Community Gardens**

- To recognize the need for community gardens.
- To establish community gardens throughout the City on public or private lands, where feasible.
- To recognize the value of community gardens, as a public amenity, in land use redevelopment.
- To encourage backyard, roof top and workplace gardening to complement community gardens, as ways to promote more greening of the City.
- To maintain existing community gardens and protect local food production.

## **City Support for Community Gardens**

The City of Victoria supports community gardens by working with community associations and gardening organizations. Subject to available resources the City will:

- Promote and raise awareness of community gardening (e.g. through the City of Victoria website).
- Provide contact information to the public of existing community garden organizations.
- Provide information to the public about who to contact to start and operate community gardens.
- Where appropriate, offer Victoria-owned land as new community garden sites, such as undeveloped parcels, closed road rights of way, marginal park land \* and along Greenways as part of a Green Streets \*program.
- Identify the City's community garden contacts including roles and responsibilities of Parks staff.
- Assess site suitability for food consumption and production, perennials and flowers through a Phase 1 Environmental Analysis.\*
- Through Neighbourhood Development Matching and Greenways Grants, provide Community and Neighbourhood Associations with funds to start up and develop community gardens.
- Provide in-kind support where feasible (i.e. excess materials like compost).

### **Guidelines for Selecting New Sites on Public Property**

Victoria supports the creation of community gardens and will assist the organization in locating new garden sites where available land exists, where neighbours have been consulted and are supportive, and where a gardening group demonstrates an interest and commitment. In identifying new sites for community gardens, the following guidelines should be considered:

- Interest and commitment of a gardening group (non-profit), in partnership with a community association
- Informed and supportive neighbours
- Availability of the site
- Volunteers willing to operate and manage the site
- Year-round accessibility of the site
- Soil quality and drainage
- Sun exposure
- Accessibility by public transit
- Access to municipal water as per standard regulations and permits
- Availability of [minimal] parking
- Provide a public education component
- Priority for new sites should be for neighbourhood areas that are underserved

### **Retention of Existing Sites**

Establishing new community garden sites are a challenge due to the lack of undeveloped parcels of land. Therefore, the protection of existing sites is an essential component of this policy. The City of Victoria endeavours to do the following to retain existing community garden sites as a valuable use of public open space:

- Support community organizations/gardening organizations in securing licenses.
- Assist in longer-term lease opportunities in developing a project or ownership of sites by the municipality.
- Support the retention and expansion of community gardening sites through policy and promotion of the value of community gardening.

### **Conditions of Use on City-owned Property**

The following conditions apply to community gardens sites on City of Victoria-owned land, and should act as a guideline for other sites in Victoria:

- The garden is developed at no cost to the City of Victoria, other than the Matching grant or Greenways program.
- A community consultation and planning process undertaken by the community association and the garden organization which indicates neighbourhood support.
- The consultation process will determine how new gardens and the surrounding neighbourhood can benefit and support each other.
- Expressions of art and creativity are welcomed and encouraged.
- Environmental innovation, demonstration and education sessions including: composting, organic gardening practices and drought tolerant gardening are encouraged.

### **Conditions for Use on Park Land**

The City will approve the use of park land for community gardens on a case-by-case basis following consultation with the affected community and subject to Council approval.

#### **A. User Agreement-between the Non-Profit Society and Community Garden members**

The non-profit [community garden] organization and/or a neighbourhood association agrees to develop, manage and operate the community garden according to a user agreement with their members which specifies the terms of use, management responsibilities, user fees, and access procedures which include the following:

- User agreement will not exceed three years; with an option to renew.
- Residents of the City of Victoria will be given priority for membership and the opportunity to garden.
- A list of regulations is developed for use of the site, and members are required to sign a contract indicating their compliance with regular maintenance and standards.
- Membership and use of the site can be revoked for non-compliance with the organization's bylaws and regulations.
- Allotment garden must be maintained to a minimum standard of aesthetics and orderliness. Year round production is encouraged.
- Participation must be made from a waiting list on a first-come, first-served basis.
- No pesticides are to be used; produce is to be organically grown.
- Produce grown on the site is not for private profit; excess produce can be donated.
- Access to the site for the enjoyment of the general public is permitted and facilitated.
- Groups are required to have liability insurance.
- Contact information is posted for neighbours to support positive relationships.

## **B. License for Use**

A license for use agreement must be signed between the property owner and the community association for the purpose of developing and maintaining a community garden. This License will be for a maximum of 3 years with an option to renew. (Samples of City License for Use agreements - Appendix B).

### **Community Gardens on Private Lands**

- Community gardens and rooftop gardens\*on non-City lands that adhere to the goals of the policy will be encouraged during re-zonings if there is a policy supporting their provision at the site. In these instances a restrictive covenant would be required to be registered on the title to secure access, hours of operation, maintenance, liability and other relevant matters.
- Community Gardens on private lands not requiring re-zoning, are encouraged in this policy and would require a minimum of three years lease agreement with the property owner and the non-profit gardening organization, in order to qualify for City Matching and Greenway funds.
- “Greening” of worksites is encouraged through gardening on rooftops, decks and balconies to assist in the beautification and greening of buildings.
- Backyard gardening and sharing of backyard gardens are encouraged as additional ways of promoting food security and food production in the City.

### **Definitions**

\***Urban Agriculture:** is the growing, processing and distribution of food and other products through intensive plant cultivation in and around cities.

\***Food Security:** all persons in a community have access to culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate food through local, non-emergency sources at all times.

\***Green Streets Program:** a program where individuals or organizations can adopt Greenway features such as traffic circles, boulevards and traffic bulges and maintain the plantings in them.

\* **Park Land:** spaces identified within a Park where the community garden groups could place garden plots, fences, compost bins, tools storage sheds and other elements necessary for the operation of a community garden that would not be considered offensive to the community.

\***Undeveloped parcels:** those city lands that have minimal development potential.

\* **Phase 1 Environmental assessment:** a historical search of the property to determine if there are any past uses that could be suspect (e.g. former gas station)

\* **Rooftop gardens:** gardens built on the rooftops, decks, etc. of buildings to increase access to outdoor green space within the urban environment.

## Community Garden Policy - Background

1. Community Allotment Gardens have operated in Victoria since the mid-seventies. Victoria is known as the “City of Gardens”, however the retention and expansion of community gardens face challenges in the future, due primarily to the high cost of land and the lack of available sites.
2. Within the City of Victoria’s municipal boundaries there are presently five community allotment gardens and three ornamental and native plant gardens for a total of eight gardens. The allotment gardens include: the Vic West Community Garden, Fernwood Compost and Education Centre, Garden Street Garden, James Bay Allotment Garden and the Michigan Street Community Garden. The ornamental gardens include: the Rockland Garden, North Jubilee Spirit Garden, and Springridge Common. Burnside had an allotment garden that was dismantled and will be rebuilt next year. All of these existing community gardens are secured by short term leases and the allotment gardens have long waiting lists. Some are on City land and some are on private land.
3. There is a national trend toward urban agriculture that has increased the demand for community gardening. Demographic changes including an aging population combined with the popularity of gardening as a favorite outdoor activity, have also increased interest in establishing community gardens. There are many other reasons for this interest including: healthy lifestyles, social interaction, cultural expression, protection of open space and nutritious and economic food production.
4. Population projections for Victoria suggest growth and interest particularly in the older age groups (baby boomers) who like to garden. Gardening is the top leisure activity for 80% of Canadians according to Statistics Canada. More households will be living in multiple family housing which generates greater demand for community gardens. In addition, the CRD’s Regional Growth Strategy promotes increased densification of the core municipalities and de-emphasizes single detached housing. Therefore in the future, there will be more demand for gardens and less land available, as fewer residents will not have their own back yards in which to garden.
5. Community gardens are invaluable to the social and ecological well-being of cities. Community gardens:
  - Promote an accessible recreational activity that contributes to the health and well-being of residents and that residents of all ages may enjoy;
  - Build communities, as neighbours garden side by side;
  - Assist low income people by providing healthy fresh organic food at low cost;
  - Increase the amount of greenspace in a city;
  - Provide educational opportunities about food production, composting and environmental education to children and adults; and
  - Increase local food security.
6. Experience and research from the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at the University of Victoria (2002-2003), shows that community gardens flourish when supported by local governments. For example, Seattle, has a target of one community garden for every 2,500 households and several full-time municipal staff supporting this objective, and has over 60 community gardens with 5,000 gardeners. Local governments can support community gardens in many ways. For example, they can provide land and promote community gardens through changes in policies and bylaws.
7. Saanich has adopted a Community Gardens Policy, which promotes community gardens and commits the City to assisting in identifying, securing and retaining suitable sites for gardens.
8. The proposed Community Gardens Policy for the City of Victoria will help promote community gardening as a healthy leisure activity and a desirable use of public open space. The policy outlines Victoria’s role, conditions of use, guidelines for selecting new sites, and strategies to retain existing ones. It will be a further step towards Victoria ensuring we are a “City of Gardens”.

## Appendix A

### Canadian Models of Municipal Support for Community Gardening

Community gardening occurs across Canada (and the United States) in cities of all sizes. The role of the local government in management, growth and operations varies from a centralized, coordinated approach to a more independent and fragmented one.

Montreal is an example of an extensive municipally-run gardening program. Established in 1975, the larger urban area had approximately 100 gardens, of which the City maintains 75 gardens supporting 6,500 plots. The City provides land, fencing, composting, manure, topsoil, tools and a clubhouse, outdoor furniture, garbage collection and maintenance. Day-to-day administration is carried out by a group of volunteers. The program is considered one of the best in North America. Several Canadian cities, such as Winnipeg, Regina and Halifax have adopted some form of this model.

In cities like Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton, efforts have been much more “bottom up”. Unlike Montreal, these municipal governments had lacked, until recently, a gardening consciousness and comprehensive approach to community gardening.

The growth of community gardens has stemmed from the action of community groups and their ability to effectively work together and lobby governments. Community groups such as FoodShare Toronto, Edmonton’s Community Garden Network and Calgary’s Community Garden Resource Group offer a centralized community voice, as well as coordination and support to garden sites. Municipal policy and infrastructure that supports the growth of community gardening has been a result of the ability of community groups to advocate for them at the political level. Now, the City of Toronto supports food security with a Food Charter, and six to ten community gardens are started each year.

In Greater Vancouver, there are 26 community gardens (providing 2,000 plots) that have developed in an individualistic way. There are some long-established sites and some emerging new ones. In 1996, the Vancouver Parks Board adopted the first community gardening policy in the region to allow community gardens on park property. The Board will provide start-up assistance and lease land to non-profit societies for a minimum five-year term. In 2002, the Southeast False Creek Urban Agriculture Strategy examining the role between food, agriculture, and the urban development was completed. It is perhaps the first study in North America to explore the role of urban agriculture in the comprehensive neighbourhood planning process.

In Greater Victoria, there are 15 community gardens that support approximately 430 plots in Victoria, Saanich, Esquimalt, Langford, Oak Bay, and Colwood. Gardens sites are grassroots operations, operating independently with little coordination. LifeCycles, a non-profit community organization interested in urban agriculture and sustainability, operates some community gardening programs. In the past two years, two gardening sites were lost to development.