



## CULTURE AND RECREATION COMMITTEE

July 6, 2005

## COMMUNITY GARDEN POLICY REVIEW

### BACKGROUND

At the July 6, 2004 meeting of the Planning and Environment Committee, staff presented a report dealing with licence renewals for community gardens on park land. The current Community Garden Policy states that the term of the user agreement will not exceed five years. Staff recommended synchronizing the renewal dates and amending the policy to allow for longer term agreements due to unique and exceptional circumstances.

Two issues were raised at the meeting by delegations - one regarding the upkeep Mount Pleasant Community Garden, and the other, a request from Strathcona and Cottonwood Community Gardens to extend their licence agreements to 25 years and 10 years, respectively. The ensuing discussion prompted the Board to request that staff review the Community Garden Policy.

### COMMUNITY GARDEN POLICY REVIEW MEETING

Park Board staff invited representatives from all community gardens to a meeting to discuss the policy. It was held on May 9 at Mt Pleasant Community Centre and was attended by representatives from 7 community gardens, as well as staff from the City of Vancouver Food Policy Office.

The policy has three sections, which were reviewed point by point:

#### Definition

- Discussion on how to make the definition more inclusive of the variety of community gardens in Vancouver
- First sentence of second introductory paragraph: Amend 'community environmental education' to read 'community development'
- Last sentence of second introductory paragraph: Amend the statement "The program has the following features" to read "The program has one or more of the following features"
- Second bullet: Amend 'community education' to read 'community development'
- Add a third bullet that would refer to the role that community gardens play in increasing biodiversity in Vancouver for the benefit of the public overall. Example statement: "An organic community garden is maintained that will increase the ecological biodiversity of Vancouver and provide increased understanding of local food production"

**Clause One** - Board support in the development of community gardens. This Clause in the policy does not require changes. There was a discussion on how the Park Board could more effectively provide information on the development and operation of community gardens:

- the Park Board could provide access to information and contact people more effectively.
- Agreed that the creation of an information package on how to set up a garden would be extremely useful with contact information, data on start-up costs, and details about resources that are available (compost, mulch, building materials)
- Technical advice from the VPB (i.e. Information on how to access and fix water pipes, toxicity testing, contact information for biologists, information on how to build a shed/fences that are pre-approved and affordable, pest control, data on operating costs, ex. Insurance) would be useful for current garden Societies.
- Provision of regulations/rules on size and measurements of tool sheds
- Encourage or facilitate partnerships between gardeners for mentorship purposes
- Encourage or facilitate matching volunteers/interns from youth, student, and seniors organizations to gardens
- Provision of signage that would provide a professional look to the garden and explain the role of the community garden in the area and information on organic gardening.
- Create a recycling program of old park board tools and other salvage materials that could be used by the community gardens at low to no cost.
- Provide translation of information whenever possible

**Clause Two** - Conditions for community gardens on park land. Suggested changes to the policy were noted:

- Bullet one: Add “provide waterlines and hook up” to start up preparation of the site - this work would be performed by COV Engineering.  
**Action:** Social Planning staff will contact Engineering to discuss their support.
- Bullet four: a. Discussion on how to increase lease renewal from 5 years to 10-25 years. It was suggested that criteria be developed to allow tenure positions based on how many features the community garden offered, how successful it had been, and how long it had been in operation  
**Action:** Parks staff to consult with Legal Services
- Bullet four: c. Amend to reflect that community gardens are a neighbourhood initiative. Example Statement: “While community gardens are a neighbourhood initiative, membership in the Society, and the opportunity to be allotted a plot, must be open to any resident of Vancouver”
- Bullet four: d. “No pesticides are to be used” will be changed to provide clarity on IPM and organic gardening.  
**Action:** VPB IPM Coordinator will be providing suitable language.
- Bullet four: e. Amend statement to read “Allotment fees charged by the society must be reported to the General Manager”  
**Action:** Parks staff to check whether allotment fees must be approved by the General Manager
- Bullet four: f. “The Society must adhere to maintenance standards set by the Park Board”  
**Action:** Park Board to develop written maintenance standards

- Bullet four: g. Discussion on the wording of this statement, but it was agreed that this policy statement was often used to ensure that structures and fences are not built on individual plots within the garden. General agreement to not amend.

#### **Other issues**

- Inconsistent operating costs: It was noted that some gardens pay water line installation fees ranging from \$10,000-\$30,000, while others do not receive a bill  
**Action:** Social Planning staff would contact the appropriate COV departments to discuss the issue and request to have sewer charges waived

#### **Summary**

- Recognition that community gardens draw upon multiple resources across departments both in the Park and City systems
- Community gardeners would like to ensure that the Park Board Community Garden Policy increases lease renewal time frames
- Confirmation that a community garden is a community driven process and the policy should reflect this element
- Increased information was requested on how to access resources for current community gardens (compost, water lines, technical advice)
- An information package on how to set up a new garden would also be welcomed

#### **Community Garden Licence Agreement**

Legal Services has developed a Licence Agreement template that can be used for all community gardens on park land. A licence is the appropriate format, rather than a lease, in that the Land Titles Act does not allow a portion of a piece of property to be leased without being subdivided. A Licence agreement is a much shorter document, and in the case of the Community Garden Agreement does not have a cancellation provision whereby the Park Board can unilaterally end the agreement, other than in the case of default by the Society. Should an agreement longer than 5 years be considered, Legal Services recommends a cancellation clause be added. This would effectively negate any advantage of having a 10 or 25 year term written into the licence agreement. Legal Services does not recommend a Licence term longer than 5 years.

There are lease agreements with longer terms. Legally, a building or portion of a building can be leased. Examples are restaurant leases or the Millennium Sports Facility.

#### **COMMUNITY GARDEN POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **Policy changes**

- Amend Definition to reflect that community gardens are a community development program, and to recognise the range of gardens that exist, while acknowledging organic gardening, biodiversity and food production.

- Amend Clause Two c. to recognition that community gardens are neighbourhood initiatives
- Amend Clause Two d. to clarify pest management
- Retain the user agreement term of 5 years, while adding language to the policy that states the Park Board's commitment to community gardening.

### **Increase Support for Development and Operation of Community Gardens**

- develop an information package to guide interested parties on how to set up a garden, including contact information, data on start-up costs, plans for garden sheds and fences, and details about resources that are available (compost, mulch, building materials)
- provide technical advice to community gardens on trades related issues like plumbing or carpentry, integrated pest management, soil testing, insurance requirements, operating costs
- encourage or facilitate partnerships between gardeners for mentorship purposes
- encourage or facilitate matching volunteers/interns from youth, student, and seniors organizations to gardens
- develop and provide signs that explain the role of the community garden in the area and information on organic gardening.
- make old park board tools and other salvage materials available to community gardens at low or no cost.
- provide translation of information whenever possible
- cooperate with other COV departments in policy development and support of community gardening on non-park lands