



Date: May 6, 2013

TO: Board Members – Vancouver Park Board
FROM: General Manager – Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Charleson Park – Proposed Community Garden

RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. THAT the Board approve a new community garden in Charleson Park, with all details to the satisfaction of the General Manager;*
- B. THAT the Board grant a five-year license to the False Creek South Neighbourhood Association to operate the community garden, with all terms consistent with the Community Garden Policy.*

POLICY

The Board tasked staff with establishing a Local Food Assets Task Force on May 28, 2012, and the Task Force is currently developing a Local Food Action Plan that is due to the Board in July 2013.

The Board endorsed Phase 1 of its new Strategic Plan on May 18, 2012, including the strategic objective to being “a Leader in Greening”, and more specifically “to support community based food production by contributing to the development of neighbourhood and city-wide food infrastructure programs and assets”.

Vancouver City Council approved “What Feeds Us: Vancouver Food Strategy” on January 29, 2013.

Vancouver City Council approved the Greenest City 2020 Action Plan (GCAP) on July 12, 2011. GCAP includes a target to increase local food assets by 50%, by 2020.

A revised Community Garden Policy was approved by the Board on September 19, 2005, which outlines the terms and conditions under which the Board will consider community gardens to be operated on park lands (Appendix A).

BACKGROUND

Staff are recommending approval of a new community garden in Charleson Park proposed by Charleson Park Community Gardeners and supported by the False Creek South Neighbourhood Association (FCSNA). The proposal was received in response to a joint call for Expressions of Interest for new community gardens and orchards issued by the City’s Park Board, Social Policy and Engineering staff in October 2012.

FCSNA's mandate is to encourage residents to be actively involved in proposed changes in the neighbourhood, and to provide residents with information on emergent issues. The gardeners have been working closely with the neighbouring McBride Community Garden coordinators to contribute to community building, healthy eating, and active living by creating community gardens in the South False Creek/Fairview area.

This proposal meets the Park Board Community Garden Policy in the following ways:

- Will create and maintain an organic community garden that will increase the ecological biodiversity of Vancouver and provide increased understanding of local food production.
- Will produce food and flowers for the personal use of society members, as well as for shared benefit of the community.
- The garden will have a community development component involving the neighbouring elementary school in a shared plot and growing program.

The Charleson Park community garden proposal was first reported to the Park Board on March 11, 2013 for a location just east of the playing field. A number of concerns were raised regarding conflicts with existing uses, and the Board decided to defer the decision. Subsequently, staff and proponents re-evaluated alternative locations for the garden, and conducted additional public consultation on the new preferred location presented in this report.

DISCUSSION

The neighbourhood of South False Creek is dominated by multi-family homes with very limited access to gardens. Charleson Park is a busy park of 7 ha that has some of everything: playing field, dog off leash area, children's playground, duck pond, seawall pathways and casual lawn areas overlooking the water. Most spaces are already claimed by existing park uses, but staff is confident that the new location will allow for a community garden of modest size without conflict. Overall, the new community garden is intended to be a neighbourly addition to Charleson Park where local residents of all ages can meet and cooperate with each other, and benefit from enhanced access to nature.

The proposed site for the community garden is just north of the playground near the False Creek Elementary School, see Figure 1. This location is favoured due to its good solar exposure, its limited conflicts with other park uses and users, and its proximity to the school and to gardeners. The site is adjacent to the seawall pathway but separated from it by a shrub and perennial border that acts as visual and wind barrier.



Figure 1: Location of proposed community garden in Charleson Park

The proposed garden includes:

- ~35 community garden plots
- A specially designed children's garden
- Universally accessible garden plots
- Shared gardening beds, also including pollinator plants
- Berry bushes and fruit trees as fencing for all to enjoy
- Seating and social space
- Tool storage
- Space for compost production

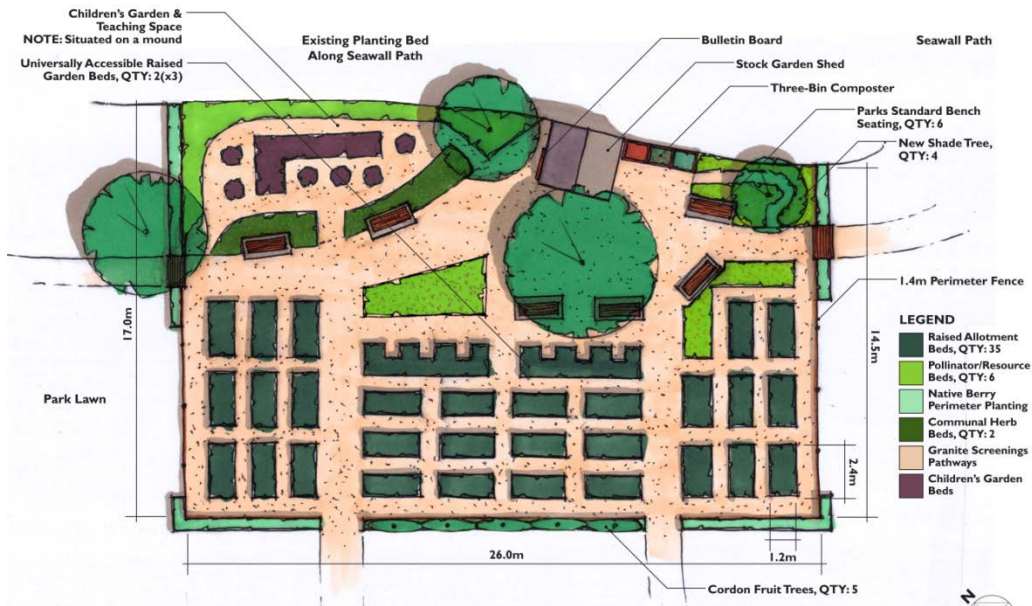


Figure 2: Proposed Charleson Park Garden Design for Consultation

The design was developed by Park Board staff in consultation with the proponents, showing all the elements desired in the garden, but the exact configuration and construction details of all the parts will be finalised after the Board has approved the use, to the satisfaction of the Park Board General Manager. In addition, community gardens have a habit of changing and evolving organically over time which is part of their appeal.

The Park Board will provide some assistance to get the garden established including installation of drainage, water hook up, the first year of compost, and potentially some food bearing trees and other support depending on available existing capital and operating budgets. The gardeners are responsible for all other costs and for all governance, maintenance and operations.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Phase 1

From January 15 – February 3, 2013, public consultation on the first proposal at the location east of the playing field was held. Staff and garden volunteers delivered approximately 400 flyers to neighbours adjacent to the proposed garden site (roughly a 2 block radius), as required by the community garden policy. In addition to this, a sign was posted on the site notifying other park users.

The Park Board received a total of 48 responses via email and telephone, and met with the principal of the False Creek Elementary School. Of these, 71% (34 submissions) were in favour of the proposal.

Phase 2

From April 22-May 5, 2013 the second round of public consultation was held on the second proposed site north of the playground and field. Staff delivered approximately 400 flyers to neighbours adjacent to the proposed garden site (roughly a 2 block radius), as required by the community garden policy. A sign was posted on the site notifying other park users, an on-line survey was posted on the city's website, and social media notification of the consultation was issued using the Park Board and Greenest City accounts. People who responded to the first consultation were also notified by email of the revised proposal.

The Park Board received a total of 204 responses via email, telephone, and on-line survey. Of these, 92% (187 submissions) were in favour of the proposal.

Method	Details	Support	Don't Support
On-line Survey	Live across from park	18	6
	Live near park	52	3
	Work near park	9	0
	Hope to garden	45	1
	Community garden supporter	44	0

Phone/email		9	7
Total		92% (187 responses)	8% (17 responses)

The most common reasons for supporting the garden proposal included:

- Strong links with children and education about food growing
- Enhanced community building for neighbours and for passers-by
- Activation of an underutilised area in the park

The most common concerns included:

- Conflicts with neighbouring off-leash dog area
- Garden size (too big, too small)
- Theft of produce/flowers
- Aesthetics and maintenance

NEXT STEPS

If the Board approves this garden proposal, the next steps will be to:

1. Produce final design that meets Park Board requirements;
2. Submit final design to General Manager for review and approval;
3. Enter into license agreement;
4. Garden construction.

SUMMARY

The proposed garden furthers the objectives of the Park Board's Strategic Plan and the Greenest City Action Plan and meets the criteria of the Community Garden Policy. The garden will contribute to increasing our local food assets, and will also build community connections. The proposed garden site is technically feasible and will work alongside other park programming. Staff recommends that the Board approve this proposal for a new community garden at Charleson Park, and then work with the Charleson Park Community Gardeners and the False Creek Neighbourhood Association to develop final plans for the project.

Prepared by:

Parks
Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
/LC

Appendix A: Community Gardens Policy

Revised September 19, 2005

Definition

The Board recognizes community gardening as a valuable recreation activity that can contribute to community development, environmental awareness, positive social interaction and community education. The Board will collaborate with interested groups in assisting the development of community gardens.

For the purposes of this policy, a community garden is defined as a community development program operated by a non-profit society. The program has one or more of the following features:

- A piece of land is utilized by the society to produce food and flowers for the personal use of society members.
- A community development program is in place which encourages the involvement of schools, youth groups and citizens who do not have an assigned plot in gardening activities.
- An organic community garden is maintained, that will increase the ecological biodiversity of Vancouver and provide increased understanding of local food production

Clause One

The Board will support the development of community gardens in Vancouver through the following means:

- Providing access to information on the development and operation of community gardens.
- Assisting interested groups in searching for suitable land for the development of community gardens. This inventory must include City-owned land, land controlled by other government agencies, and privately owned land.
- Assisting in the development of user agreements with the owners of sites chosen.
- Assisting with the development of a community led environmental education program.

Clause Two

If it is determined that park land is the most suitable site for community gardens, the following conditions will apply:

- The garden is developed at no cost to the Board, except that prior to the first season, the Board will, at its cost, prepare the site for planting by removing grass, ploughing the soil and adding compost.
- A community consultation process indicates neighbourhood support for the garden.
- A garden site plan must be drawn up and approved by the General Manager. The plan must include the layout of the plots and indicate any proposed structures or fences.
- A non-profit society agrees to develop and operate the gardens according to a users agreement which will specify the term of use, management responsibilities, user fees and access procedures including the following specific terms:
 - a. "The standard term of the user agreement will be five years. The Board may consider the granting of multiple terms in exceptional circumstances. The issuance of such longer terms is warranted in circumstances where the Society

can demonstrate that the standard five year term would significantly restrict the Society's ability to:

1. comply with Park Board policies and direction
 2. conduct community outreach programming beyond the Societies members
 3. implement a long term plan
 4. execute significant approved site improvements
 5. such other circumstances that the Board deems relevant
 6. For terms longer than five years, a review and formal reporting to the Board will be required at each 5 year period and the agreement will incorporate a strengthened termination clause to allow both the Society and the Park Board the option to terminate the agreement with adequate notice."
- b. Allotments of space must be made from a waiting list on a first come first served basis.
 - c. 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.
 - d. Organic gardening methods and integrated pest management principles are to be followed.
 - e. Allotment fees charged by the society must be reported to the General Manager.
 - f. The Society must adhere to maintenance standards set by the Board.
 - g. No barriers to general public access to the site can be erected.
 - h. Garden practices shall comply with all Park Board and City Policies and Bylaws.

Although located on Parks with the prior approval of the Park Board, Community Gardens are operated by volunteers from the community.