



Date: February 10, 2015

TO: Park Board Chair and Commissioners
FROM: General Manager - Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation
SUBJECT: Urban Agriculture Policy

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Board approve the Urban Agriculture Policy (as outlined in Appendix A), which will replace the Community Garden Policy, adopted in September 2005 (Appendix B).

POLICY

The *Community Garden Policy*, approved by the Board in September 2005, outlines the terms and conditions under which the Board will consider community gardens to be operated on park lands (Appendix B).

In May 2012, the Board endorsed the strategic priorities of “Engaging People” and being “a Leader in Greening”. More specifically, the Board directed staff “to support community based food production by contributing to the development of neighbourhood and city-wide food infrastructure programs and assets”.

In July 2013, the Board approved the *Local Food Action Plan*, with a direction to develop new community gardens and other food assets in parks and community centres.

Vancouver City Council approved *What Feeds Us: Vancouver Food Strategy* in January 2013.

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

Vancouver City Council approved the *Vancouver Food Charter* in 2007.

BACKGROUND

The Park Board *Community Garden Policy* has provided excellent guidance for establishing new community gardens over the last decade. Community gardens are typically characterized by small garden allotments for individual community members, and many gardens built over the last 10 years under the policy have followed this design and function.

In recent years, new opportunities and ideas for how urban agriculture can support community development, inclusion, and education have been emerging. There is increased interest in collaborative gardening; gardens focused on art, culture, and education; accessibility for people of all abilities; gardens with close ties to community centre and other programming; and other innovative ways to grow food in the city. Collaborative and shared

gardening in parks is a recommended priority as this approach maximizes food production and access to valuable and limited green space for as many people as possible.

These developments have provided the catalyst for revisions to the current policy to guide the Park Board's approach to urban agriculture. The *Urban Agriculture Policy* also clarifies the Park Board's public engagement process around building new food growing infrastructure, and provides guidance on the design and operation of such projects. Updating the *Community Garden Policy* was a high priority action identified in the Park Board *Local Food Action Plan*.

Furthermore, the design, appearance, and upkeep of these spaces require attention and these are addressed in the revised policy.

DISCUSSION

The revised policy responds to four key issues that have arisen as an expansion of local food projects underway in parks and with community centres. This includes the need to:

1. Expand the definition of the types of food-growing encouraged in parks, beyond traditional allotment gardens;
2. Describe some common urban agriculture criteria;
3. Describe the public consultation standards for different types of urban agriculture projects; and
4. Outline the Park Board's role and expectations regarding project design and operations.

Public Consultation

From December 15, 2014 to January 18, 2015, staff undertook public consultation on the proposed policy revisions. The consultation strategy included: a presentation to the Vancouver Food Policy Council; targeted stakeholder notification; an on-line survey; and a social media campaign. Targeted stakeholder notification included two emails to each of the following groups to inform them about the proposed policy revision, as well as encourage them to complete the on-line survey:

- Current community gardeners on park, city, and other public and privately owned lands;
- Local Food Assets Task Force and Working Group members;
- Environmental Education and Stewardship Task Force and Working Group members;
- Vancouver Food Policy Council members;
- Neighbourhood food networks;
- Vancouver Urban Farming Society;
- Indigenous Food Systems Network;
- Vancouver School Board; and
- Community centre programmers and organizations offering food, environmental, arts, and culture focused programming.

Of the 56 responses received, 44 (79%) supported the policy revision, 11 (20%) opposed it and 1 (1%) person was unsure. Respondents that opposed the revision tended to do so because of the most common concerns described in more detail below. Respondents identified themselves as connected to this issue in the following ways: regular park user (63%); community gardener (61%); advocate for growing food in the city (60%); and others (40%). Note that respondents could make more than one selection. All but two of the responses came from people who indicated that they lived in the City of Vancouver, as verified through the postal codes provided.

The most common concerns identified are provided adjacent to responses to each concern. In addition to these, valuable comments were made about specific issues, many of which resulted in adjustments to the *Urban Agriculture Policy* as presented in Appendix A.

Most common concerns raised	Response
Concern about the Park Board no longer picking up green waste.	The Park Board does not currently pick up waste or organics from parks; the City’s Sanitation Department provides this service. Some gardens have made arrangements with the Sanitation Department for a fee-for-service pick up of green waste, and this service could be made available for interested gardeners in parks.
Question about how the new policy will apply to existing gardens.	This policy revision will apply to new gardens, expansions of existing gardens, or significant changes to existing gardens within their current footprint. The intent is not to require existing gardens to undertake major renovations, however the Park Board will look for opportunities to work together with existing gardens where they would like to make changes, for example improved accessibility, adding shared or programmable growing spaces, inclusion of hobby beekeeping, etc. Any significant changes to existing gardens would be made through the license agreement and renewal process.
Specific questions and concerns were raised about several different garden design details (e.g. soil testing, fence and trellis height, meaning of “tidy”, water wise gardening, etc.).	The draft policy revision was amended to describe design and maintenance requirements more generally, and to refer to the Vancouver Urban Agriculture Guide and a need for review of designs by Park Board staff, that will be developed by the Park Board with our colleagues in Engineering and Social Policy in 2015 to provide more detailed design guidelines. This will allow for more regular updates to the guidelines as new ideas, issues, and best practices emerge.
Concerns about the policy slowing things down, not enabling urban agriculture, and not being enforced.	The intent of the policy is to open up the Park Board to a wider range of project types and make the requirements for siting, designing, approving, and maintaining a project much clearer for proponents. There is a staff person responsible for supporting urban agriculture projects and facilitating their establishment and operations.

SUMMARY

Staff recommend the Board approve the revised policy as described in Appendix A. The *Urban Agriculture Policy* aligns with the Park Board's Strategic Plan and the Local Food Action Plan. The policy will enable community organizations to further their community development and engagement work on food literacy skills, healthy living, and stewardship.

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Appendix A Park Board Urban Agriculture Policy

This policy replaces the Community Gardens Policy (2005)

The Park Board would like to acknowledge that these urban agriculture activities take place on the traditional unceded territory of the Coast Salish people.

Definition

The Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation recognizes urban agriculture as a valuable food-focused activity that can contribute to community development, environmental awareness and benefits, positive social interaction, learning, health, exercise, wellness, and access to fresh food. The Park Board will collaborate with interested groups in assisting the development of urban agriculture projects if they meet the intent and objectives of this policy.

For the purposes of this policy, urban agriculture is defined as a community development program operated by a non-profit society that supports the objectives of the Board's Local Food Action Plan¹ and the City of Vancouver's Food Strategy².

Urban agriculture includes, but is not limited to, the following types of activities:

- Collaborative and shared gardening
- Community gardening
- Educational, arts, and culturally focused gardening
- Gardens focused on Indigenous people, plants, and knowledge
- Fruit and nut trees
- Hobby beekeeping
- Pollinator gardens and infrastructure
- Permaculture projects
- Edible landscaping
- Urban farming³

¹ Available here: <http://vancouver.ca/your-government/local-food-assets-task-force.aspx>

² Available here: <http://vancouver.ca/people-programs/vancouvers-food-strategy.aspx>

³ In the Vancouver Food Strategy, urban farming means urban food production for the primary purpose of revenue generation, and may be operated on a for-profit, non-profit or social enterprise model. An urban farm is a site where fresh food is grown primarily for sale, or where the food is primarily consumed by someone other than the grower(s).

Appropriate Urban Agriculture Sites

The Park Board prioritizes collaborative and shared gardening to maximize access to valuable green space. The Park Board will support the development of urban agriculture in the Vancouver park system through the following means:

1. Providing access to information on the development and operation of urban agriculture projects, and helping to facilitate a process that will determine project feasibility.
2. Making connections between project proponents and other potential partners.
3. Assisting interested groups in searching for suitable land for the development of urban agriculture projects, noting that different types of agriculture projects have different criteria used in identifying suitable land. This review must include City-owned land, land controlled by other government agencies, and privately owned land.
4. Helping to connect project proponents to appropriate landowner, if not the Board.
5. If the most appropriate site is determined to be a Park Board site, then the Board will support the project as described throughout the rest of this policy.

General Urban Agriculture Criteria

The urban agriculture project will be operated by a non-profit society according to the following criteria:

1. The duration of urban agriculture on the site is time-limited, according to the terms of the license agreement. The standard term for the license agreement will be five (5) years, however this will be evaluated with each project. The Park Board may consider the granting of multiple terms providing the project is operating according to the license agreement and meeting these criteria.
2. Grow primarily edible, art and craft, and/or Indigenous plants.
3. Grow plants for the purposes of:
 - a. project member and community benefit;
 - b. skills and capacity building;
 - c. arts and culture;
 - d. benefitting pollinators;
 - e. donating to charitable causes; and/or
 - f. collaborating with other programs taking place in Park Board parks or facilities.
4. Do not sell products from the project; some exceptions may apply upon discussion and approval with Park Board staff.
5. Actively encourage and support a diversity of community members (e.g. age, ability, cultural background, etc.) to participate in the garden from conceptual stages through to ongoing operations.
6. Ensure accessibility of garden to people with a variety of abilities.
7. Provide open access to the project at all times; locked barriers are not permitted.

8. Follow the *Vancouver Urban Agriculture Guide*, updated regularly and including design, operation, and maintenance guidelines to ensure accessible, productive, safe, healthy, tidy, and community-oriented gardens.
9. Operate at no cost to the Park Board. The exception to this is that prior to the first season, Park Board staff may assist with site preparation, the details of which will depend on the type of project. Park Board staff will also winterize the water supply in the spring and fall of each year.

Public Consultation and Approval Process

If it is determined that park land is the most suitable site for the proposed urban agriculture project, and if the appropriate urban agriculture criteria are met from the above list, the following practices will be followed for public consultation.

Type 1:

For all community, collaborative, educational, and arts and culture focused gardens larger than 250 m², pollinator projects larger than 500 m², as well as for fruit and nut tree plantings of more than 20 trees, a community consultation process must be completed with details as follows.

1. The consultation will last a minimum of 2 weeks.
2. It will be jointly facilitated by Park Board staff and the project proponent.
3. Information about project design, proponent, project features, site, and any other pertinent information will be developed and used for all consultation materials.
4. At least one informational sign will be posted on site.
5. Flyers will be delivered or mailed to the doors of all businesses and residents within an approximate 2 block radius of the site, with some exceptions potentially applying for very high density neighbourhoods.
6. An on-line forum that enables people to provide feedback.
7. A majority of support must be indicated through the consultation in order for staff to recommend approval of the project to the Park Board.
8. Park Board approval.

Type 2:

Fruit and nut tree plantings of 20 or fewer trees, garden projects up to and including 250 m², pollinator projects up to and including 500 m², edible landscaping, hobby beekeeping, and mason bee lodges may not require formal consultation, with some exceptions applying at the discretion of the General Manager or their designate. In most cases, informational signage will be posted on site. These projects require Park Board approval.

Exceptions:

1. Urban farming projects will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, with consultation methods determined for each project.
2. In cases where an urban agriculture project is incorporated into a larger park development project, the consultation for the overall park project will incorporate any urban agriculture components.

3. In unique circumstances, staff may opt for a different approach to public consultation than what is described in this policy if there is a strong rationale.

Project Design and Operations

Prior to initiating project construction and beginning operations, the non-profit society must provide the following to the Park Board:

1. A final project design including: all necessary details required in the *Urban Agriculture Guide*; all direction received from Park Board staff; the license agreement; and response to feedback received through the consultation, as appropriate. This plan must be approved by the Park Board General Manager or their designate.
2. An operating plan that describes how the garden will comply with this policy as well as with the current *Urban Agriculture Guide* and the license agreement requirements.
3. A construction and operating budget including description of secured funding sources.
4. Proof of two million dollars in liability insurance; liability insurance requirements may be modified at any time at the discretion of the Directors of Risk Management and Legal Services.
5. A license agreement approved and signed by the non-profit society Board as well as the Park Board General Manager or designate.
6. Park Board staff will work with society members to respond to any and all issues and complaints in a timely fashion, and in accordance with the license agreement.
7. Society members must provide the Park Board with the following information and documentation at least once per year:
 - a. License fee (typically \$1 per year);
 - b. Accurate contact information;
 - c. Basic project details as requested in a survey (e.g. wait list numbers, any new infrastructure, etc.); and
 - d. Proof of insurance (limits and requirements as outlined above in item#4).

Appendix B

Community Gardens Policy

Revised September 19, 2005

Definition

The Board recognizes community gardening as a valuable recreation activity that contributes 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.