

BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

COMMUNITY GARDENS AND ORCHARDS



Photo Source: PWL Partnership Landscape Architects Inc.

PART 1: PURPOSE AND DEFINITION

As stated in the Park Board Urban Agriculture Policy, “The Vancouver Park Board (VPB) 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 Community Gardens and Orchards Best Management Practice shall serve as a companion document to the Urban Agriculture Policy and recommends key considerations for VPB staff while facilitating the implementation of an urban agriculture project.

Community Gardens and Orchards can be an important component to maintaining a thriving and active park system. Among the many active opportunities provided by VPB, Community Gardens represent an opportunity for the community to not only engage with parks, but also to influence them through their own direct involvement. This becomes increasingly important as the City of Vancouver continues to add density resulting in more residents with no or limited gardening opportunities. Community Gardening is a valuable activity that can contribute to community development and education, increased self-reliance, community health, public open space, wildlife habitat, environmental awareness, and positive social interaction. In addition, community gardens can be a means to help address food insecurity, relieve hunger and improve nutrition.

Community Gardens occur on many types of land within the City of Vancouver, which can include park space. For the purposes of this Best Management Practice (BMP) the definition of a Community Garden shall follow the definition as noted in the Park Board Urban Agriculture Policy. A Community Garden is defined as a community development program operated by a non-profit society that supports the objectives of the Board’s Local Food Action Plan and the City of Vancouver’s Food Strategy. Types of activities include but are not limited to collaborative and shared gardening; community gardening; educational, arts and culturally focused gardening; gardens focused on indigenous people, plans, and knowledge; fruit and nut trees; hobby beekeeping; pollinator gardens and infrastructure; permaculture projects; edible landscaping and urban farming.

PART 2: APPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

This BMP is limited to park space within the City of Vancouver (COV) only, though the VPB may act in a supporting role to the development of Community Gardens and Orchards on land under other ownership. The VPB Urban Agriculture Policy outlines the scope of responsibility for all entities involved with Community Gardens, including the VPB. The VPB is not responsible for initiating the development of Community Gardens or Orchards within park space but does support community group proposals for underutilized spaces that could benefit from gardening activities. Further detail on how the VPB supports locating suitable sites is listed in the Urban Agriculture Policy.

There are also a set of criteria that must be met for a proposal to be successful, as detailed in the Urban Agriculture Policy. First and foremost, the project must be operated by a non-profit society. Duration is limited and the standard term is 5 years, though multiple terms can be granted. The garden must be made up of primarily edibles, indigenous plants, or plants used for the purposes of arts and crafts. In addition, the project should be of community benefit, which may be skill or capacity building; for arts and culture; beneficial to pollinators; for charitable donation or in collaboration with other programs in Park Board parks or facilities. No sales are allowed; diverse participation should be encouraged and supported; accessibility to all ages and abilities must be ensured; and open access to the project must be provided at all times.

All projects must also complete a public consultation and approval process lasting a minimum of 2 weeks. VPB staff will jointly facilitate this process with the project proponent. Further details are listed in the Urban Agriculture Policy.

PART 3: DESIGN GUIDELINES

It is important to bear in mind that the creation of a Community Garden or Orchard is a community process and that the VPB serves in an advisory and support role. Focus should be on ensuring that key policies and rules are implemented in the design and program of the garden, rather than VPB staff doing them

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themselves. VPB staff should ensure that applicants are aware of the Park Board Urban Agriculture Policy, *Urban Agriculture Guide* and the Community Garden Resources listed on the COV website and should familiarize themselves with the various resources and guidelines. VPB staff should reference these resources when reviewing proposals to ensure the process is consistent and that unexpected information or information outside the COV and VPB policies is not mandated.

During the design process the soils should be tested for heavy metals, salinity and hydrocarbons. Results may influence decisions, particularly whether to allow edibles or not, whether or not to use raised beds as well as the design of the raised beds. Imported soil to use in the beds must be tested as well. It is also critical to ensure that no pressure treated lumber will be used so that approved soils do not become contaminated after installation.

Key design considerations include understanding the geographic distribution of other existing gardens; physical considerations such as sun and shade, tree canopy, topography, and how much land preparation is required before the project can be built. An understanding of adjacent site uses will also inform what type of agriculture may be appropriate. For example, in some cases, such as areas where many animals like dogs or geese may be present, gardening activities should be limited to non-edibles. Other considerations include understanding the likely user group and what types of design parameters, such as plot size, group plots, rest areas, distance from water and storage, pathways and related amenities would be most suitable.

VPB staff should also ensure that sufficient support facilities are included in the design, such as hose bibs, storage, electrical outlets, and composting facilities that can adequately deter rodents. Other items may include potting benches and greenhouses.

Many garden applicants will not have formal design training and it is important for the ongoing success of the garden that VPB staff work with successful applicants to refine the selection of a potential site and provide key information, review, and guidance that they will use in their design process. The *Urban Agriculture Guide* should be used as the primary resource for this process.

PART 4: MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS

It is VPB policy that community gardens and orchards are operated at no cost to the board. The Vancouver Urban Agriculture Guide provides guidelines on operations and maintenance to community members.

The exception to the above is that depending on the type of project, VPB staff may assist with site preparation. This may include removal of grass, ploughing the soil and adding compost. VPB staff will also winterize the water supply in the spring and fall of each year. During the permit period VPB staff should observe that maintenance procedures are followed including organic gardening and integrated pest management practices, and maintaining a barrier free environment.

END OF BMP