

ITEM 2. PROPOSED COMMUNITY GARDEN – 54-56 ERSKINEVILLE ROAD, ERSKINEVILLE**FILE NO: S101150****SUMMARY**

There are currently two community gardens in Erskineville: one located on land owned by the Department of Education at Angel Street; and another located on land owned by Council at 54-56 Erskineville Road, Erskineville, which has no formal approval and is non-compliant with Council's *Community Gardens Policy*.

A small group of local residents has used the Council-owned property at 54-56 Erskineville Road as an unapproved community garden since 2009. The site has an area of 350 square metres and is classified as operational land.

Council adopted the *Community Gardens Policy* in February 2010 following extensive consultation and public exhibition of the Policy. The Policy outlines criteria for the establishment of community gardens and a process for Council to approve them.

The Erskineville Road garden group prepared a site plan and management plan for the proposed community garden and asked the City to proceed with community consultation as required by the Policy. In May 2013, the City consulted the community about the garden through Sydney Your Say, notification on the site fence and a letter box drop to residents and businesses within a 500 metre radius of the site. A total of 23 responses were received, with 12 supporting and 11 opposing the garden.

The comments in support of the garden were mostly general and linked the garden to sustainable living in the city, education and cultural change. Some respondents gave suggestions for ways in which the garden could be improved. Others said that they supported the garden but noted that it is looking 'unkempt' or 'neglected' in its present state.

The negative comments expressed strong opposition to the garden. Feedback was that the garden is an eyesore that excluded most of the community and is locked off 'for a select few'. There were concerns regarding problems with pests and vermin, as well as safety issues (one resident reported an attempted break in from the site).

This report recommends that the community garden at 54-56 Erskineville Road not be approved and that City staff consult with the community gardeners about joining an existing community garden or finding an alternative suitable site.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that:

- (A) the community garden application for the use of 54-56 Erskineville Road, Erskineville not be approved;
- (B) City staff meet with current gardeners to encourage them to join an existing community garden; or

- (C) if there is sufficient support, City staff explore options to establish an additional community garden at a suitable location.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Site Map – 54-56 Erskineville Road, Erskineville

Attachment B: Photos of the Unapproved Erskineville Community Garden

Attachment C: Erskineville Garden Draft Management Plan and Design

Attachment D: Community Gardens Policy 2010

Attachment E: Map of Existing Community Gardens

Attachment F: Community Consultation Summary Report

Attachment G: Suggested locations for a Community Garden

BACKGROUND

1. There are currently two community gardens in Erskineville:
 - (a) one located on land owned by the Department of Education at Angel Street; and
 - (b) another located on land owned by Council at 54-56 Erskineville Road, Erskineville, which has no formal approval and is non-compliant with Council's *Community Gardens Policy*.
2. The site at 54-56 Erskineville Road, Erskineville is a 350 square metre block. It has one street frontage and is surrounded by residences on the three remaining sides. The site has a south facing orientation. The site is owned by Council and is classified as operational land. It has no structures or buildings on it (refer to site map at Attachment A).
3. In 2009, a small group of local residents started to use the site without approval, initially for community composting and then expanding to a community garden.
4. City staff met with the group in 2009 to assess the site for suitability as a Council approved community garden.
5. The garden group were advised that the site did not comply with the selection criteria for a successful growing space for food production within the draft *Community Gardens Policy*.
6. The site has issues with overshadowing, is small in size, has only one street frontage on a busy road and is opposite a petrol station. The site is not suitable for multi-purpose community use and does not meet the City's Guidelines for Open Space in the *Open Space and Recreational Needs Study 2007*.
7. From the initial site assessments, City staff recommended that the garden group seek to join the Angel Street Community Garden, which is located 300 metres from Erskineville Road, or look at alternate locations within Erskineville for establishing an additional community garden. Possible locations nominated were:
 - (a) Green Ban Park, Erskineville Road, Erskineville – 80 metres away;
 - (b) Ellen Lawson Rest Area, Erskineville Road and Charles Street, Erskineville – 240 metres away;
 - (c) Joseph Sargent Community Centre, Prospect Street, Erskineville – 277 metres away;
 - (d) Rotary Park, Henderson Road, Erskineville – 640metres away;
 - (e) Solander Park, Park Street, Erskineville – 690metres away; and
 - (f) Harry Noble Reserve, Swanson Street, Erskineville – 667metres away.
8. City staff met with the garden group to discuss the requirements to establish an approved community garden in accordance with the City's *Community Gardens Policy*. This included the development of a management plan and design of the garden that could be used to consult with the local community.

Community Garden at 54-56 Erskineville Road

9. The site has been used by a small number of local residents to compost, grow and produce plants and also as a children's play area.
10. The garden is not well maintained (see photos in Attachment B) and the City has received numerous complaints and criticism about the garden. Most notably, these have been regarding:
 - (a) vermin and pests;
 - (b) compost bin placement and associated issues;
 - (c) safety hazard concerns; and
 - (d) unsightly appearance and lack of maintenance.
11. City staff have worked with the garden group since May 2012 to:
 - (a) reduce the cockroach issue by advising the garden group to clear a one metre buffer zone around the property. Council has been spraying pesticide within the buffer zone to reduce cockroaches on a monthly basis;
 - (b) provide the garden group with advice about composting and suggesting the group relocate the compost bins into the centre of the garden to reduce impacts on neighbours;
 - (c) assess and manage the site risks posed by the site to the gardeners (e.g. removal of asbestos pots, uncapped stakes and trip hazards);
 - (d) assess the garden and meet with the group to encourage a monthly working bee to clean the site up and to keep the garden clean, neat and tidy; and
 - (e) provide advice and direction on the development of a community garden management plan and design.
12. The City provided examples of other management plans and advice on where the management plan could be improved.
13. The garden group has developed and submitted a draft community garden management plan and design for the site (refer Attachment C). This plan and design does not comply with Council's *Community Gardens Policy*. Key items not addressed include:
 - (a) aims and objectives of the garden;
 - (b) safety in the garden;
 - (c) roles of the gardeners and when they meet;
 - (d) funding to ensure the garden becomes a successful self-managed community garden;
 - (e) accessible design for gardeners, wheelbarrows and wheelchairs; and
 - (f) community support and engagement for new volunteers.

Community Gardens Policy

14. Council adopted the *Community Gardens Policy* in February 2010 and the City is supportive of community gardens, which are managed by the community primarily for the production of food and to contribute to the development of a sustainable urban environment (refer Attachment D). The City recognises community gardening is a valuable recreational activity that contributes to the health and well-being of the wider community and provides a wide range of environmental, social and educational benefits.
15. There are 17 community gardens across the City of Sydney Local Government Area, and this is expected to increase significantly due to high demand and support by the community.
16. The City encourages garden groups to become self-managed and to develop a management plan to communicate to the community how these public spaces will be managed by the group.
17. There is an established community garden at the Angel Street Permaculture food forest, which is 300 metres away from the Erskineville Road garden, and this garden group is looking for more volunteers. There is also a community garden in Newtown, which is 600 metres away (refer to Attachment E).

Community Notification of the Proposal

18. In February 2013, the Erskineville Road garden group asked the City to consult the community on their proposed community garden as required by Council's *Community Gardens Policy*.
19. In May 2013, Council consulted the community through the Sydney Your Say website for a period of three weeks from 1 May to 24 May 2013 to seek feedback about the community garden proposal.
20. Letters were sent to 350 residential and business properties within a radius of 500 metres from the garden notifying them of the consultation process and how they could comment on the proposed community garden.
21. Key stakeholders who have had involvement with the garden or who have contacted the City concerning the garden were notified by email of the consultation. These included the Erskineville Road garden group, local real estate agents, the BP Service Station opposite the community garden and any community members who had previously shown an interest in the garden.
22. The notification letter and copy of the proposed garden design were placed on the front fence of 54-56 Erskineville Road (refer Attachment C).
23. All consultation materials, including the proposed site plan and management plan were uploaded to sydneyyoursay.com.au. A feedback form was available for people who wished to have their say.
24. A total of 23 responses were received, with 12 supporting and 11 opposing the proposed community garden (refer Attachment F for submission details). Quotes from incoming correspondence include:

- (a) *"I support the plans for the Erskineville Community Garden"*;

- (b) *"I feel that the community could benefit from the garden";*
 - (c) *"I am time poor so cannot assist with the maintenance of the garden, however I think it is a wonderful initiative";*
 - (d) *"I live behind the garden in a unit and I have been overrun by German cockroaches";*
 - (e) *"Erskineville garden to be removed, its ugly eyesore";* and
 - (f) *"The so-called garden is a rubbish patch of mainly weeds".*
25. The comments in support of the garden were mostly general and linked the garden to sustainable living in the city, education and cultural change. Some respondents gave suggestions for ways in which the garden could be improved. Others said that they supported the garden but noted that it is looking 'unkempt' or 'neglected' in its present state.
26. The negative comments expressed strong opposition to the garden. Feedback was that the garden is an eyesore that excluded most of the community and is locked off 'for a select few'. There were concerns regarding problems with pests and vermin, as well as safety issues (one resident reported an attempt break in from the site).
27. Given the City's concerns with the community garden management plan that was placed on public exhibition, and the issues raised in the submissions, it is proposed that City staff meet with current gardeners to encourage them to join an existing community garden. Staff will also continue to explore options to establish an additional community garden at a suitable location if there is sufficient support.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

28. *Sustainable Sydney 2030* is a vision for the sustainable development of the City to 2030 and beyond. It includes 10 strategic directions to guide the future of the City, as well as 10 targets against which to measure progress. This report is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) *A leading Environmental Performer* – community gardens help residents to reduce their environmental impacts;
 - (b) *A Cultural and Creative City* – community gardens provide a focal point for cultural and educational impacts;
 - (c) *Vibrant Local Communities* – each community garden is unique and provides an opportunity for social interaction and community building;
 - (d) *Sustainable Development, Renewal and Design* – community gardens can showcase sustainable living and be integrated into new development; and
 - (e) *Implementation through Effective Partnerships* – community gardens involve a range of partnerships and provide an opportunity for residents to engage in social and environmental programs.

Greening Sydney Plan

29. The development of community gardens and the engagement of the community in green volunteering activities are key focus areas of the *Greening Sydney Plan* adopted by Council in May 2012.

Organisational Impact

30. City staff will continue to provide support to the community in identifying suitable sites and establishing community gardens in accordance with the *Community Gardens Policy*.

Social / Cultural / Community

31. Community gardens provide a range of healthy recreational activities that promote physical and emotional well-being. They encourage social interaction for diversity in the local community.

Environmental

32. Community gardens provide a range of environmental benefits, including developing community capacity for local food production and sharing knowledge throughout the community about reducing environmental impacts and increased sustainable practices.

Economic

33. Local food initiatives, like community gardens, can have an important role in providing safe, affordable and accessible fresh food to local residents.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

34. There are sufficient funds in the 2013/14 operating budget to fund the development of a second community garden in Erskineville that complies with Council's *Community Gardens Policy*, and to relocate onsite garden materials from 54-56 Erskineville Road.

OPTIONS

35. Council could choose to approve the proposed community garden at the existing location. This is not the preferred option.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

36. The community garden proposal for 54-56 Erskineville Road has been consulted with local residents through letter box drops, on-site signage and through the Sydney Your Say website.

GARRY HARDING

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