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COMMUNITY GARDENS POLICY 2010

Community Gardens Policy



City of Sydney

Community Gardens Policy

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Community Gardens Policy

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Executive Summary

Community gardens are unique forms of public open space which are managed by the community primarily for the production of food and to contribute to the development of a sustainable urban environment. They are places for learning and sharing about sustainable living practices, and for actively building community through shared activities.

The City of Sydney recognises community gardening as 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.

There are currently thirteen community gardens across the Local Government Area (LGA) and this is expected to increase significantly in the near future due to high community demand and to support the vision of Sustainable Sydney 2030.

The purpose of the Community Gardens Policy is to establish a framework for the City's commitment to the appropriate management of both new and existing community gardens. This framework will provide a clear procedure for the establishment of new gardens, outline a basis for communication and partnership between stakeholders and provide a rationale for decision making that ensures consistency in the management of all community gardens in the City of Sydney.

Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- promote the development of community gardens as demonstration sites where people can meet, work together, build stronger community relationships and learn about sustainability which supports the Sustainable Sydney 2030 vision for a Green, Global and Connected City;
- document and standardise processes and procedures to ensure consistency in the management of all community gardens within the City of Sydney;
- help increase the number of community gardens, according to the City's capacity, community need and availability of appropriate sites by developing a clear process and allocating appropriate resources to support new and existing community gardens;
- clarify the rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in community garden projects including the garden volunteers, the City and partnering organisations with reference to issues such as public liability, maintenance, safety and access;
- support community gardens to be self managed to increase community ownership;
- recommend planning controls to support the development of community gardens on land established for community use and to be integrated into new development;
- ensure that there is potential for a community garden within a kilometre (a 15 minute walk) from all residential areas; and,
- promote access to fresh, organic and locally produced fruit and vegetables.

Policy for Community Gardens in the City of Sydney

Introduction

For the purposes of this Policy, community gardens are:

A not-for-profit, community based enterprise producing food primarily for the consumption of the gardeners. They are a community managed, multi-functional garden space that when carefully designed and managed can provide a wide range of environmental, social and economic benefits.

Community gardens entail substantial community involvement in planning, decision-making, garden management as well as day-to-day activities. Collaborative projects such as community gardens offer a range of benefits that align with the Sustainable Sydney 2030 Vision including demonstrating best practise sustainable design, building effective partnerships between community groups and government agencies and helping residents to reduce their environmental impacts.

Community gardens also support the objectives of the City's Social Policy 2006 and Social Plan 2006 – 2010 by offering opportunities for community participation and the development of social capital and cultural diversity.

The City considers partnership as key to the development of resilient community gardens and has developed strong working relationships with the Botanic Gardens Trust and Housing NSW Community Greening program, the University of NSW Community Development Project, the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network, the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance, the Aids Council of New South Wales (ACON) as well as number of community organisations.

In the City of Sydney LGA, community gardens are located on land owned by Council, Housing NSW, Department of Education and the Uniting Church. This Policy applies to Council support for all community gardens within City of Sydney LGA unless otherwise specified in the Policy.

This Policy is supported by the City's 'Getting Started in Community Gardening' guide which is available on the City's website and provides additional information on the benefits of community gardens and advice for groups wanting to start new community gardens.

Different types of Community Gardens

There are a number of different models of community gardens. The most common forms in Australia are:

- community gardens with a mixture of allotments for each member and some shared areas;
- communal gardens where the entire garden is managed collectively. Some examples of communal gardens are food forests (which include structured layers of plants such as edible groundcovers, shrubs and trees);
- verge gardens are where garden beds are established on the nature strip. These are considered a type of community garden in this policy when they are managed collectively by a group of local residents and decisions are made jointly.
- school kitchen garden projects are defined as a community garden when local residents outside of the school community can join the garden and manage the garden in partnership with the school. In this model, the garden may include individual plots for residents and communal garden beds that the school can manage and use for lessons on cooking, nutrition and the environment and provide produce for the school canteen. School kitchen gardens

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aren't always set up as community gardens due to perceived problems with access and security for people outside of the school community;

- Community gardens on public housing land usually contain a mixture of plots and common areas and are specifically open to residents living in public housing; they are supported by the Botanic Gardens Trust and Housing NSW Community Greening program.

Examples of different types of Community Gardens



Woolloomooloo Community Garden is an example of a garden with a mixture of plots and some shared areas.



North Wollongong Community Garden is an example of a Communal Garden, where the entire garden is managed collectively.



Verge Garden (above) – Myrtle St, Chippendale, an example of verges or nature strips being used for food production and communal gardening.



Alexandria Community Garden is an example of a new community garden established in a school where students and residents learn about food production.

The City's Role

The City intends to develop strong partnerships with garden groups and sponsoring agencies. The City has adopted a community development approach to community gardens where gardening groups manage the gardens themselves with the support of the City and other partnering organisations. This approach leads to increased community ownership which can assist in the sustainability and success of a community garden.

Supporting community gardens to be self managed also helps the City achieve the Sydney 2030 Action (10.2.1) to *maintain and extend roles in decision-making and in current consultation, engagement, education and information procedures.*

The City will provide the following services to community garden groups:

Advice and Materials:

- Provide advice and ongoing communication with garden coordinators and committees;
- help establish new community gardens, develop garden management plans and provide assistance in obtaining grants and resources; and
- support to establish recycling, worm farms and composting facilities.

Education and Training:

- Delivery of workshops and training on an as-needs basis; and
- online resources through the City's website and annual bus tours for gardeners.

Support:

- Connect local gardens and gardeners to each other to help build relationships and encourage the sharing of information and experiences;
- support the Sydney Community Gardens Network, the Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network and the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance;
- promote community gardens through the City's website, publications and events; and,
- facilitation of garden meetings when needed and community engagement processes.

Financial Support to Community Gardens

Funding is critical for the long-term success of any community garden project. Community Gardens should be planned with the goal of long term financial sustainability so that they are not dependent on unreliable sources of funding such as grants or sponsorship from partnering organisations. Being financially independent may also increase the feeling of empowerment and security as participants manage more aspects of the community gardens themselves.

The City will support the development of community gardens through its grants and sponsorships programs and garden groups are encouraged to apply. To help support groups, the City will also consider funding the following items:

- urgent repair of items that pose a significant safety risk and cannot wait for a grant. This will be mainly for community gardens on Council owned land;
- public signage and educational materials for the community garden; and,
- a limited supply of mulch, manure, soil and plants to community gardens.

Funding for all these items will depend upon budget constraints and demand for resources and should not be relied upon by participants in community gardens. For more information on the City's grants programs visit <http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/Community/GrantsAndAwards>

Community Management of Gardens

Community gardens should be managed and implemented by the community, however this must be undertaken in such a way that the needs of all stakeholders are taken into account.

Responsibilities of Community Gardeners

Community gardeners are responsible for maintaining the garden so that the health and safety of the surrounding community is not adversely impacted. In particular, gardeners are responsible for ensuring that:

- they cooperate and manage effective relationships with the surrounding neighbourhood, partnering organisations and other gardeners;
- they do not discriminate against one another due to differences in race, culture or sexuality;
- they regularly communicate with the City and/or other landowners and stakeholders;
- decision making is democratic, transparent and inclusive;
- any water leaving the garden is not contaminated by sediment, fertiliser, manure or excessive organic matter that might pollute waterways;
- noise levels within the garden are maintained at a level that is not disturbing to neighbours;
- compost, worm farming systems and fertilisers are maintained so as not to attract vermin or produce unpleasant odours;
- rainwater harvesting systems are maintained to ensure water is of a high quality;
- lawn areas are regularly mowed and garden beds kept tidy. Any materials delivered to or stored at the garden are maintained so as not to create an unpleasant environment for other residents in the community; and,
- visitors are welcomed to the garden, and members of the public can access the community garden during daylight hours.

Rights of Community Gardeners

Community gardeners have the right to:

- develop their own internal policies, organisational procedures and plan of management providing they liaise with and get support from the landowner;
- be consulted with regard to any decision that may affect the project and to be advised by the City in a timely manner of any policy changes that impact them;
- be treated with respect by other gardeners, local residents and partnering organisations; and,
- negotiate a secure and reasonable agreement with the landowner.

Conflict Resolution and Complaints Procedure

Community Gardens should aim to promote an environment that is tolerant and caring. However, it is inevitable that conflicts may sometimes arise, either within the garden group or with external stakeholders such as local residents or the City. In the event of a conflict arising, steps should be taken immediately to accelerate its resolution, including communicating respectfully with those involved; and engaging the assistance of a mediator where appropriate. The City recommends that community gardeners develop a management plan which includes a gardener's agreement that all members agree to follow. An agreement should provide information on the expectations of behaviour on site, the management of shared garden areas and plots; and a conflict resolution process. See also: Security of Tenure, page 11.

Insurance and Risk Management

It is essential that garden groups be aware of the risks associated with undertaking a publicly accessible community garden project. Each garden group has a duty of care to the community who access the garden areas. To ensure funds are available to meet that duty, a minimum of \$10,000,000 of public liability insurance policy is required to be taken out. The City recognises that public liability insurance has an associated cost, and may not be easily accessible to small community groups. Options for obtaining insurance cover include the following:

- the City's existing insurance policy may be extended to cover gardens on Council land where an extensive risk management process has been undertaken (the City's insurance policy does not automatically cover community gardens located on Council land);
- the group can become an incorporated association through the NSW Office of Fair Trading and manage their own insurance;
- the group may be auspiced by another organisation or agency, such as a neighbourhood centre, and as a project of that organisation will be covered by their insurance; and,
- a group of community gardens with similar objectives might obtain insurance together.

Incorporation of the Garden Group

The City encourages community garden groups to have a clear and identified legal structure. Garden groups can apply to the NSW Office of Fair Trading to become Incorporated Associations. This arrangement affords the group some flexibility in the management of funds and enables them to open a bank account, obtain public liability insurance cover and apply for government grants. Incorporation as an association requires groups to establish a management committee with annually elected office bearers and to commit to regular meetings. This can be beneficial for the project as it maintains a structure that can address management issues; having a committee also helps share the tasks of garden management and avoids excessive responsibility being placed on a few people or the garden management becoming dominated by one person.

City of Sydney Use of the Garden as a Demonstration Site

The City's vision is to promote the development of community gardens as demonstration sites for sustainable living that through careful design and management can be utilised for educational and community activities. In demonstrating sustainability best practice, community garden groups are strongly encouraged to include outdoor learning, performance and meeting spaces; interpretative signage; and to use recycled materials and practice water-efficient and organic gardening.

Where community gardens are established on land owned by Council, the City retains the capacity to use the garden as a demonstration site for community education activities such as tours and workshops. The City will work with the garden group to ensure that organised activities do not conflict inappropriately with other garden uses, such as regular working bees.

Community Composting Facilities

Where feasible, the City will also work in partnership with community gardeners to establish community composting and worm farm facilities within community gardens and in small parks. Composting facilities in parks will only be set up on a trial basis when there is a group of local residents willing to attend training in maintaining compost systems. The City will also continue to encourage residents to install a compost bin or worm farm in their own home or strata block by providing free workshops where participants receive a free worm farm or compost bin. In areas where this is difficult and there is considerable community interest the City may also consider trialling a compost facility within a verge garden. Any facilities which are not maintained to the required standards may be removed or relocated at the City's discretion.

Establishment of Community Gardens on Council Land

The City encourages resident groups to work in partnership with the Community Gardens Coordinator and other relevant staff in the establishment of new community gardens. Establishing a community garden can be a complex process requiring consultation with a broad range of stakeholders and there are a number of issues that need to be considered before a community garden is initiated.

All applicants should first read the City's *Guide to Getting Started in Community Gardening* available on the City's website. This Guide outlines the elements of starting a new garden including information on how to build partnerships and start a garden group, conduct site assessments, develop a management plan and design the garden.

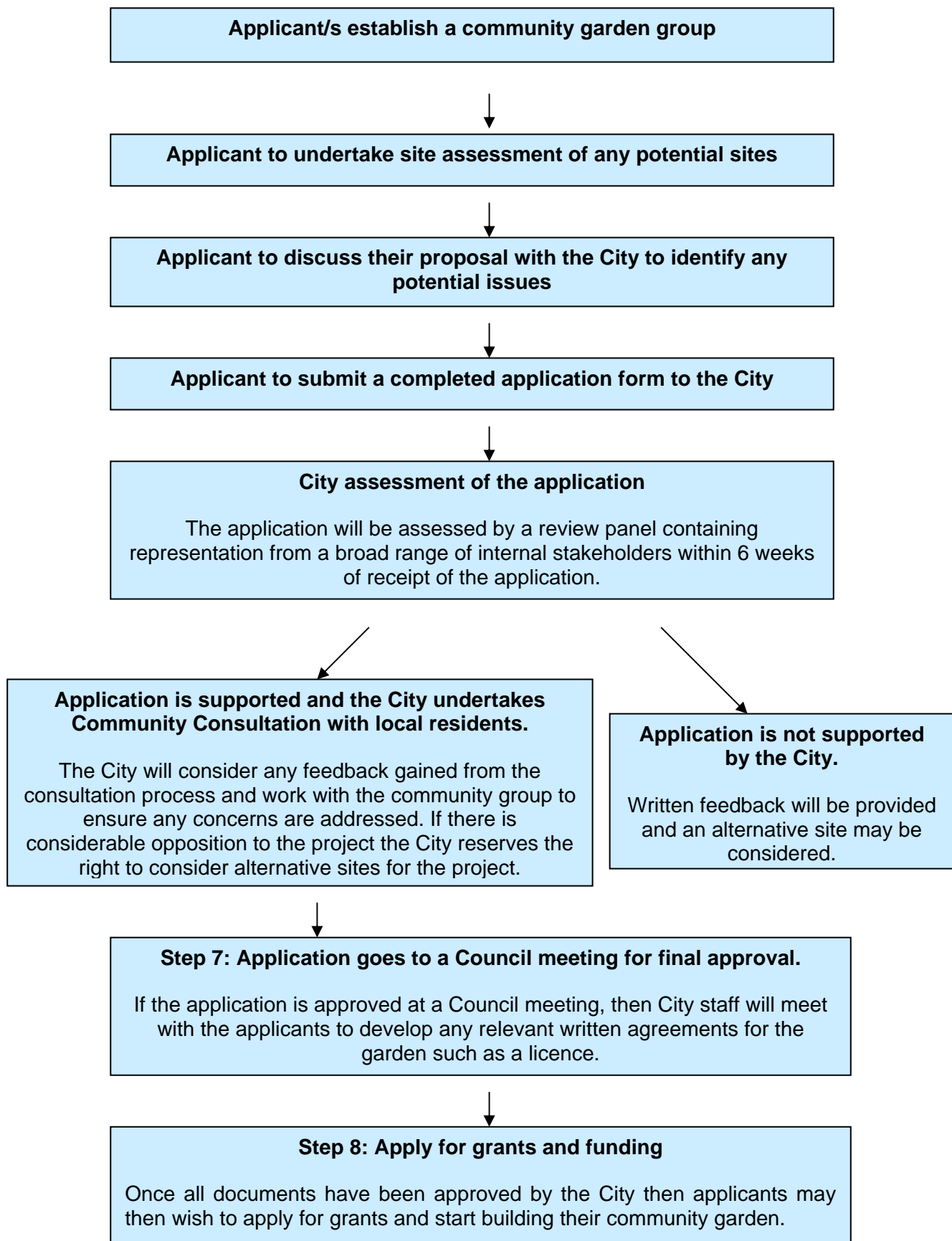
In order for the City to consider supporting the development of new community gardens on City owned or controlled land, applicants will need to address the site selection criteria outlined in the box below and follow the procedure for starting a new community garden. The first steps in this procedure include establishing a community garden group, conducting a site assessment of potential sites and discussing their proposal with the City to identify any possible issues. Once a preferred site has been established, applicants will need to submit a completed application form to the City. If the application is supported, then the City will organise community consultation with local residents and work with the community garden group to address any concerns.

Site Selection Criteria for New Community Gardens on Council Owned Land

1. **Location:** Sites classified as Community Land under the Local Government Act may be appropriate. These sites are usually established for community use such as park lands, open spaces and community centres that have outside areas. Priority will be given to sites located in high density areas and near community centres or community organisations that might be able to support or partner the project.
2. **Safety:** Sites should have no major safety or health concerns; and have good passive surveillance (for example, can be easily seen from nearby houses or shopping areas).
3. **Accessibility:** Sites should be accessible for a range of user groups. Sites should be located close to public transport, allow disabled access, have vehicle access (e.g. for delivery of mulch and soil) and accommodate groups wanting to visit the garden.
4. **Solar access:** Sites need to be suitable for growing vegetables and receive full sunlight - ideally for at least 5 -6 hours per day.
5. **Size:** Sites which are large enough to accommodate garden beds, composting systems, rainwater tanks, seating areas, shelter for gardeners and for community workshops and demonstrations.
6. **Water:** Sites with easy access to water or buildings nearby from which rainwater can be collected.
7. **Soil Contamination:** Sites may need to be checked for soil contamination. If high levels are present then advice will need to be sought from experts on whether it is suitable for growing food.
8. **Multiple Use:** Sites where a community garden can be integrated without conflicting adversely with other land uses and where the community garden can still be used by non gardeners for passive recreation and educational workshops.

Note: It may not always be possible to find a site that meets all of the above criteria. The City will prioritise the sites that can meet as many of the requirements as possible.

Procedure for Starting a New Community Garden



Establishment of Community Verge Gardens

Establishing verge gardens requires special design consideration by the City to ensure that accessibility on footpaths, traffic and road conditions are not affected and that other environmental issues such as stormwater capture and street trees are considered in the design of new garden beds.

Applicants wanting to establish a new community garden on the nature strip will need to first speak to the City to see if their street is suitable for the inclusion of garden beds. Applicants will also need to form a community garden group and get support from all their neighbours for their garden project so that the City can build new garden beds along the entire street. Once a group has been established they will be required to complete a Community Gardens Application Form and comply with the requirements outlined in this Policy.

Security of Tenure

New gardens established on Council land will be given an initial licence for a trial period of one year. The City will not charge community garden groups for licence preparation fees. If the garden group fulfils all its responsibilities with regard to the management of the garden, a longer arrangement may be negotiated with the group.

A licence or other agreement with the group could be revoked or not renewed if:

- the group disbands or ceases to function due to internal conflict. In this situation the City may try and assist the group to resolve the conflict first by employing a mediator or facilitator;
- the garden is not maintained or becomes unsafe for public access; and,
- appropriate insurance cover is not maintained.

See also: Conflict Resolution and Complaints Procedure, page 7.

Land Use Planning

To facilitate urban agriculture and community gardening within the City, the Draft Local Environment Plan (LEP) will include community gardens as exempt development provided that applicants go through the application process for new gardens as outlined in this Policy. Common elements of a community garden such as rainwater tanks, fences and solar photovoltaic systems are currently already listed as exempt development according to certain specifications.

The City will prioritise supporting the development of new gardens in areas that do not currently have a community garden within a short walk from a major residential area. This includes suburbs such as Ultimo, Surry Hills, Kings Cross, Green Square, Beaconsfield and Roseberry.

Open Space Management

The City considers community gardens to be a valid and important land use within the City's open space network. Where appropriate, community gardens may be incorporated into plans of management for public open space.

The City's *Open Space and Recreation Needs Study (April 2007)* identified a large number of neighbourhood and pocket parks within the City that are under 2000 square metres that are not suitable for sporting activities. Some of these parks are under utilised, and may be considered as potential sites for new community gardens.

Upgrades to parks, open spaces or community facilities may also provide an opportunity for the City to consult with the community and see if there is enough interest and capacity to develop

community gardens as part of a proposed upgrade or to include a community garden in a new development. Existing community facilities can be ideal sites for community gardens because they normally already have infrastructure such as toilets, shelter and storage areas.

Supporting other Local Food Production Initiatives

Community gardens are just one type of urban agriculture; the City will continue to support a range of local food projects to accommodate the different needs of residents living and working in Sydney. The City will provide information, advice, grants and support to local food initiatives such as community supported agriculture schemes, food cooperatives, farmers markets, school kitchen gardens, City Farms, food aid and rescue programs and Green Roofs. The City will also continue to run workshops and education programs for residents in organic gardening, resource recovery and sustainable living.



Appendix:

1. Definitions

A number of terms are used in this Policy to describe community gardening and associated activities.

Allotment Gardens are a community garden where gardeners have exclusive access to a plot or small area of the garden. This term is common in the United Kingdom, where allotment gardens are normally managed by the local government. In Australia, gardens with allotments are predominantly managed by the gardens members and supported by government organisations.

Community supported agriculture or subscription farms describe a system where consumers pay in advance for a regular box of vegetables or other farm products from a farmer directly so that the farmer has a stable income and guaranteed market for the crops.

City Farms are large demonstration sites designed to educate residents, businesses and schools about organic gardening, waste reduction, water and energy conservation, native plants and animals and climate change in an interactive setting. They vary enormously but often include community gardens as well as education facilities, community nurseries and farm animals.

Farmers Markets are a market where farmers sell their local produce directly to consumers.

Food Cooperatives and Local Buyers Groups are groups where urban consumers work together to source and bulk-buy local, organic produce.

Food forests are used to describe an area used for the production of food where the design of the area mimics a natural ecosystem by including structured layers of plants such as edible groundcovers, shrubs and trees. Food forests in a city environment can be part of a park or public open space.

Food security is defined by the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance as a condition in which all people at all times have the ability to access and prepare sufficient, safe, appropriate, nutritious and affordable food necessary to enjoy an active and healthy life.

Interpretive signage describes signage designed to explain a feature of the landscape to enhance interaction with the site and add educational value.

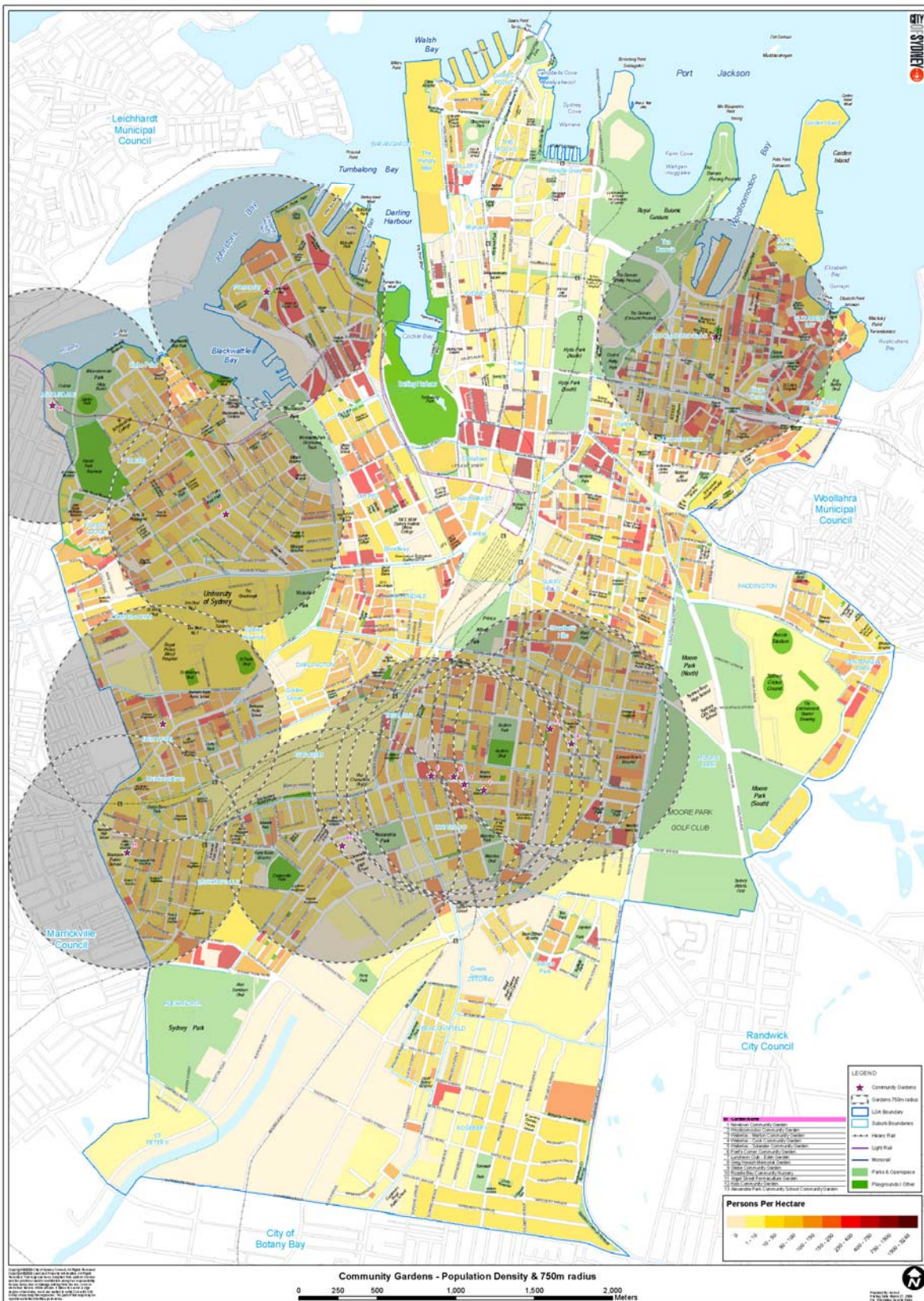
Organic growing describes a food production system that does not use toxic chemicals including synthetic fertilisers and pesticides. It aims to improve the long-term fertility of the soil.

School kitchen gardens are developed within or outside school property for the purpose of educating children about food production and supplying school kitchens with fresh food to teach cooking skills and serve fresh food to children.

Verge gardens where the garden beds are established on the nature strip and managed collectively by local residents rather than the City.

2. Map and List of Community Gardens in the City of Sydney (October 2009)

This map shows the 13 existing community gardens in the City of Sydney. The shaded circles indicate the area (750 metres) around each garden that is within a short walk.



List of Community Gardens in the City of Sydney (October 2009)

Details on each garden is listed on the City's website at:

<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/communitygardens>

- Alexandria Park Community School – Community Garden
Alexandria Park Community School Oval, Park Rd, Alexandria
- Angel Street Permaculture Garden - Corner of Angel and Harold Streets, Newtown
- Cook Community Garden, Marton Community Garden and Solander Community Garden
Raglan Street, Waterloo
- Glebe Community Garden
St Johns Road, Glebe
- Greg Hewish - Memorial Garden
Corner Ogden and Marriot Streets, Redfern
- Luncheon Club - Eden Garden
Raglan Lane, Waterloo
- Newtown Community Garden
Corner Rose Lane and Stephen Streets, Newtown
- Food for Everyone – Community Verge Gardens
Myrtle Street, Chippendale
- Poet's Corner Community Garden
Morehead St, Redfern (in front of the Kendall Building)
- Pyrmont Kids Garden
Distillery Drive, Pyrmont
- Woolloomooloo Community Garden
Corner Dowling St and Sydney Place, Woolloomooloo



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