

ITEM 3. DRAFT COMMUNITY GARDENS POLICY (INCLUDING COMMUNITY GARDEN GUIDELINES AND MATERIALS GUIDELINES) – PUBLIC EXHIBITION

FILE NO: S111812

SUMMARY

This report recommends that Council approve the updated Community Gardens Policy and supporting documents, the Community Garden Guidelines and Preferred Materials for Use in Community Gardens, for public exhibition and community comment.

Community gardens are a unique form of open space that encourage participation and access by self-managed community groups primarily for the production of food crops.

The City supports the development of community gardens as demonstration sites where people can participate, learn and share knowledge. The gardens allow the community to work together to build stronger relationships around sustainable living practices. This supports the Sustainable Sydney 2030 vision for a Green, Global and Connected City.

There are currently 20 community gardens, three footpath verge gardens and one community composting site located across the City of Sydney Local Government Area (LGA), with expectations these numbers will increase.

The City's current Community Gardens Policy was adopted in 2009 and is now due for review. The policy establishes a framework for the management of new and existing community gardens. The Community Garden Guidelines and Preferred Materials for Use in Community Gardens have been developed to support the policy and to provide residents, gardeners and other stakeholders with a resource to guide and ensure consistency in the management of community gardens across the City LGA.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that Council approve the Community Gardens Policy, Community Garden Guidelines and Preferred Materials for Use in Community Gardens, as shown at Attachments B, C and D, respectively, to the subject report, for public exhibition and community comment for a minimum period of eight weeks.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: List of Community Gardens in the City of Sydney Local Government Area

Attachment B: Community Gardens Policy

Attachment C: Community Garden Guidelines

Attachment D: Preferred Materials for Use in Community Gardens

BACKGROUND

1. The City recognises the emerging sustainability challenges posed by climate change and local food security. Local residents are encouraged to participate in community gardens to socialise and grow organic, nutritious food for the health and wellbeing of the community.
2. Currently, the City supports 20 community gardens, three footpath verge groups, and one community composting facility throughout the City LGA (see Attachment A for locations).
3. The new Community Gardens Policy has been updated from the current sixteen-page Policy into a six-page document (refer Attachment B). This is to encourage new and existing community garden groups and local residents to embrace the policy and provide a greater understanding of the framework and requirements to develop and manage community gardens.
4. The new Community Garden Guidelines have similarly been updated from the current seventy-one page document to a thirty one-page document, and formatted to be more user-friendly and easier to read (see Attachment C). The guidelines incorporate and expand upon information in the Community Garden Policy and encourage residents to have an understanding of the process, requirements and responsibilities of a community garden group.
5. A Preferred Materials for Use in Community Gardens document (see Attachment D) has also been developed to assist new and existing community garden groups with suggestions of materials to be used in a community garden, rooftop garden or footpath verge garden. The document provides choices of new and recycled materials and advises of the advantages and disadvantages of each.
6. The City's Grants and Sponsorship Policy requires grant-funded community gardens to develop a management plan and design before funds are released. This is to ensure the community capacity exists and that there is the support and collective knowledge to develop and manage a community garden. The updated Community Gardens Policy and Guidelines will provide new groups with an awareness of responsibilities and processes to develop a successful long-term community garden. They also provide tools for groups to prepare their applications for grant funding and garden approval.
7. City staff are currently assisting residents at four locations with proposals for community gardens in Roseberry, Redfern, Zetland and Erskineville. Further interest has also been highlighted in recent community consultation related to new developments in the Ashmore estate and Green Square.
8. The latest community garden being developed is the St Helens Community Garden at Glebe. Stage one, with a capacity of 35 members, was completed in May 2014 and receives regular comments of support from the local community.
9. The new policy encourages all community garden groups to develop a management plan and garden design. This is to increase communication between garden members, local residents, land owners, and external partners.
10. Five of the existing community garden groups have already developed management plans, with the documents greatly assisting in the overall coordination and management of the community garden network.

11. The policy requires community garden groups to become self-managed, with their management plans, applications for grants and sponsorship, funding, and membership structures being coordinated and well defined. The City can assist with technical advice in developing the management plan.
12. Community gardens are open for all members of the community to participate and shall act as demonstration sites.
13. The City inspects community gardens throughout the year to ensure that risks are minimised, and sites are well maintained and presented to the required standard.
14. Community gardens are diversifying, with their activities expanding from growing healthy organic produce crops, to installing native bee hives to assist with flower pollination, as well as proposing to have chickens for fresh eggs and manure to assist with nutrients in the garden soil.
15. The policy requires community gardeners to have an awareness and understanding of the risks and hazards associated with their sites, and to have a plan to manage site health and safety. It is important to ensure community garden sites are safe for the local community to visit.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

16. *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 helps residents reduce environmental impacts of climate change, reduce waste and encourages use of sustainable materials in garden construction;
 - (b) A Lively and Engaging City Centre – community gardens provide focal points for engaging the community in cultural and educational activities;
 - (c) Vibrant Local Communities and Economies – each community garden is unique and provides an opportunity for social interaction and community building. The gardens encourage environmental activity through sharing knowledge and skills;
 - (d) Sustainable Development, Renewal and Design – community gardens can showcase sustainable living and be integrated into new development; and
 - (e) Implementation through Effective Governance and Partnerships – community gardens involve a range of partnerships and provide an opportunity for residents to engage in social and environmental programs.

Organisational Impact

17. The updated policy and guidelines will enable the City to:
- (a) provide a supporting framework and a clear process to establish a new garden, or support existing gardens. This includes assessing new sites against the site selection criteria, encouraging groups to develop garden management plans for approval, and supporting existing gardens through communication and partnerships;
 - (b) guide and encourage groups to become self-managed community gardens that are well maintained by communicating the City's expectations to all community gardeners;
 - (c) clarify the rights and responsibilities of community gardeners on management issues such as insurance, safety, maintenance and garden inspections; and
 - (d) provide guidance on preferred construction materials for new and existing community gardens, including planter boxes for footpath verges or rooftop gardens, composting systems and general garden equipment.

Social / Cultural / Community

18. The policy and guidelines support the social, cultural and community benefits of community gardens including:
- (a) providing a recreational activity that promotes physical and psychological health and wellbeing;
 - (b) encouraging social interaction for marginalised communities by ensuring community gardens are open for residents to participate and use as demonstration sites;
 - (c) supporting opportunities for community participation and the development of social capital and cultural diversity;
 - (d) recommendations from the Physical Disability Council of NSW who have provided feedback and supported detailed drawings of the wheelchair garden bed in the Preferred Materials for Use in Community Gardens document. The City encourages having at least one garden bed accessible in all community gardens for people in wheelchairs or those who have less mobility.

Environmental

19. The policy and guidelines support the City's vision to promote the development of community gardens as demonstration sites for sustainable living, that can be used for educational and community activities. The documents also outline the environmental benefits of community gardens including:
- (a) the development of community gardens as 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;

- (b) empowering the community to develop and support the provision of community gardens;
- (c) developing community capacity to grow local food and reduce environmental impacts of transporting and distributing fresh food;
- (d) demonstrating the importance of water as a resource for growing food crops and showcasing water harvesting and conservation in urban areas;
- (e) encouraging local residents to minimise waste going to landfill by recycling food and garden waste through community composting systems in community gardens and parks; and
- (f) demonstrating sustainable gardening practises by encouraging organic gardening, using recycled or local materials, and growing local bush tucker plants for biodiversity.

Economic

20. Local food initiatives, such as community gardens, can have an important role in providing healthy, affordable and accessible food. Community gardens also encourage partnerships between gardens, cafes and local businesses.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

21. A draft operating budget of \$80,000 for the support and development of community gardens is proposed in 2015/16. This is used to assist new and existing community gardens with materials, education and promotional activities.
22. The policy does not propose any application or licence fees for new community gardens on Council-owned land.
23. The City will encourage community garden groups to apply for funding through its Grants and Sponsorship programs.

CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES

24. The Community Gardens Policy was adopted in 2009 and was due for review in 2014. The policy review has been completed and, following public exhibition for community comment, it is proposed to report the new policy to Council for adoption later this year.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

25. A community engagement strategy has been developed to inform stakeholders - including residents, City staff, community gardeners, adjoining councils and relevant organisations - about the Community Gardens Policy and Guidelines.

26. The Sydney your Say webpage will include copies of the documents and provide people with an online form to provide feedback. Advertisements will be placed in local newspapers inviting comment on the policy, and small group meetings will be offered to community groups if required.

GARRY HARDING

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