

ITEM 2. COMMUNITY GARDENS POLICY (INCLUDING COMMUNITY GARDEN GUIDELINES AND PREFERRED MATERIALS GUIDELINES) – ADOPTION**FILE NO: S111812****SUMMARY**

This report recommends that Council adopts the draft Community Gardens Policy and supporting documents, the Community Garden Guidelines and Preferred Materials for Use in Community Gardens (draft Policy and Guidelines).

On 18 May 2015, Council unanimously approved the exhibition of the draft Policy and Guidelines. The exhibition period ran for eight weeks from 9 June to 31 July 2015.

Community consultation included:

- distributing electronic and hard copies of the draft Policy and Guidelines to existing community garden groups, Council facilities, and other agencies (government, universities and industry);
- an online survey on sydneyyoursay.com.au; and
- nine facilitated workshops with existing community garden groups.

The consultation captured extensive feedback from community gardeners on the Policy and Guidelines.

Community response has been positive with 85 per cent of respondents rating the draft Policy and Guidelines as excellent, very good, good or fair.

Amendments have been made to the draft Policy and Guidelines in response to the outcomes of the community consultation. A summary of the comments and proposed changes are contained in Attachment E.

RECOMMENDATION

It is resolved that Council adopt the Community Gardens Policy, Community Gardens Guidelines and Preferred Materials for Use in Community Gardens, as shown at Attachments A, B and C, respectively, to the subject report.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Community Gardens Policy

Attachment B: Community Gardens Guidelines

Attachment C: Preferred Materials for Use in Community Gardens

Attachment D: Report of Strategic Consultation for Draft Community Garden Policy and Guidelines

Attachment E: Summary of Feedback from Community Consultation and Actions

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. The City currently supports 19 community gardens, three community footpath verge gardens, and one community composting facility.
3. 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 to use manures as nutrients in garden soil.
4. Council adopted the current Community Gardens Policy in 2009 with a review to be carried out after five years. An updated Community Gardens Policy, Community Garden Guidelines and Preferred Materials for Use in Community Gardens (refer Attachments A, B and C) was approved for public exhibition by Council on 18 May 2015.
5. The draft Policy and Guidelines provide community garden groups with advice on responsibilities and processes to develop a successful long-term community garden. They assist community garden groups to become self-managed by giving them tools for developing management plans and designs, making applications for grants and sponsorship, consider future funding for garden operations, and how to coordinate and manage membership.
6. The draft Policy and Guidelines outline how community groups can apply to install community gardens in public open spaces and on footpath verges. These gardens must have a group of active people with the skills to self-manage the gardens and work in a safe manner. Support from local residents and a suitable site are critical to success.
7. The draft Policy and Guidelines include checklists and criteria to help community gardeners plan their garden, as well as information on garden lay-outs, types of materials to use, composting methods, and advice on insurance requirements.
8. The Preferred materials for Use in Community Gardens (Attachment C) is a new document to assist new and existing garden groups with suggestions for materials to be used in community gardens, by providing choices on new and recycled materials along with the advantages and disadvantages of each.
9. The draft 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.
10. A good example of the Community Garden Policy in practice has been the Bourke Street Community Garden at Woolloomooloo. The garden started in 2012 with four inexperienced gardeners and has now grown to a successful garden with 25 members, a management plan and grant funding. They also engage with the Oznam Learning Centre further enhancing their educational offerings to the community.

Consultation Outcomes

11. The draft Policy and Guidelines were placed on public exhibition from 9 June to 31 July 2015. Details on the community consultation are in Attachments D and E.
12. The City sought extensive feedback from community gardeners to:
 - (a) test the Policy and Guidelines to ensure they are clear and practical;
 - (b) help develop awareness of the Policy and Guidelines within target groups; and
 - (c) continue to strengthen capacity within the community to create and manage safe and productive community gardens.
13. Participation in the consultation included:
 - (a) nine workshops attended by 49 community gardeners in the City; and
 - (b) 64 online surveys (42 per cent from members of community gardens and 33 per cent from residents).
14. Participants identified the positive outcomes of community gardening – environmental, wellbeing and social connection, alongside the challenges faced by community gardeners including security, safety, resources and group management.
15. Feedback from the community was supportive of the City's efforts in producing the draft Policy and Guidelines and appreciative of the City's support for community garden groups.
16. 85 per cent of survey respondents rated the draft Policy and Guidelines as fair to excellent (67 per cent said good or above).
17. Overall, survey respondents found the documents clear, concise and educational.
18. Illustrations and photos throughout the documents were described as inspiring and helpful.
19. The City has reviewed the outcomes from the community consultation and has amended the draft Policy and Guidelines where required (see Attachments A, B and C). Changes have been underlined and italicised.
20. The community consultation feedback is detailed in Attachment D - *Report of Strategic Consultation for Draft Community Garden Policy and Guidelines* and Attachment E - *Summary of Feedback from Community Consultation and Actions*.
21. The key changes to the draft Policy include:
 - (a) emphasising the importance of the social connection and inclusion provided by community gardens;
 - (b) encouraging community gardens as long term initiatives for the broader community to participate for a sustainable future, including sustainable membership numbers;
 - (c) advising circumstances where the City may remove a community garden; and

- (d) the City supporting community gardeners to develop skills to become self-managed and maintain the garden to a high standard.

KEY IMPLICATIONS

Strategic Alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030

22. *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 draft Policy and Guidelines are aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) A Leading Environmental Performer – community gardens help residents reduce the environmental impacts of climate change, reduce waste and encourage s 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 government, private sector and resident partnerships and provide an opportunity for engagement in social and environmental programs.

Organisational Impact

23. The draft Policy and Guidelines will enable the City to:
- (a) continue providing a supporting framework and 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, and supporting existing gardens through communication and partnerships;
 - (b) guide and encourage groups to become self-managed community gardeners that are 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 and maintenance; 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.

24. Experienced professional staff are employed by the City to implement the draft Policy and Guidelines and to enable the continued development of community gardens and related activities. This includes assistance to new and existing groups and guidance on how they can become self-managed, engage with participants, and provide education classes.

Social / Cultural / Community

25. The draft Policy and Guidelines provide and 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 the 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 each community garden for people in wheelchairs or those who have less mobility; and
 - (e) development of community gardens, footpath verge gardens, and community composting sites to benefit the community by providing a vibrant and creative meeting place. They play a key role in socialising of diverse cultures and by producing access to fresh produce for households, and providing education to people about sustainability in an urban environment.

Environmental

26. The draft 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 strong 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 practices by encouraging organic gardening, using recycled or local materials, and growing local bush tucker plants for biodiversity.

Economic

27. Local food initiatives such as community gardens, can have an important role in providing safe, healthy, affordable, and accessible food. The benefits reach well beyond the commercial value of the food itself to educational, cultural and social values for participants and the broader community. They also encourage partnerships between gardens, cafes and local businesses.

Greening Sydney Plan

28. The Greening Sydney Plan proposes actions such as community gardens to *“Empower the Community to green our City as a key delivery focus area. The City recognises that community gardening offers residents the opportunity to grow and harvest their own produce and help reduce household waste through community composting. Community gardens also create more green patches bursting with vegetables, plants and flowers, across our city.”*

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

29. Provision has been made for operational expenditure of \$80,000 for the support and development of community gardens in the 2015/16 budget. This is used to assist new and existing community gardens with materials, education, and promotional activities.
30. The policy does not propose any application or licence fees for new community gardens on Council-owned land.
31. The City will encourage community garden groups to be self-funding and to apply or funding through grants and sponsorship programs.

CRITICAL DATES / TIME FRAMES

32. The Community Gardens Policy was initially adopted by Council in 2009 and is due for review.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION

33. On 18 May 2015, Council unanimously approved the exhibition of the draft Policy and Guidelines for community comment. The exhibition period ran for eight weeks from 9 June to 31 July 2015 and included:
- (a) flyers seeking public feedback about the draft Policy and Guidelines and encouraging the community to fill out an online survey on Sydney Your Say;
 - (b) hard copies of the draft documents being available at the City’s one stop shop at Town Hall House, neighbourhood service centres and libraries;

- (c) a newspaper advertisement in the Sydney Central Courier inviting feedback and comments on Sydney Your Say or by direct submissions to the City;
- (d) a media release to promote the draft Policy and Guidelines and the online survey on the Sydney Your Say website;
- (e) an email invitation to participate to key stakeholders:
 - (i) 15 community garden groups in the city;
 - (ii) 54 community gardeners in the city;
 - (iii) 50 residents who have registered interest in becoming a gardener;
 - (iv) 57 councils and organisations many of whom have worked with the City in the past to benchmark practices, including the Royal Botanic Gardens and the Australian City Farm and Community Gardens Network;
- (f) a dedicated page on sydneyyoursay.com.au and online survey; and
- (g) workshops with community gardeners.

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