

Public Exhibition - Draft Community Greening Framework

File No: X131907

Summary

The City of Sydney (the City) offers a range of successful and longstanding community greening programs that encourage residents and local businesses to participate in greening the city.

The City currently oversees Footpath gardens, Community gardens, Sydney City Farm volunteer programs, Bushcare/Landcare volunteer groups and Community greening events.

The City's community greening programs enhance urban life for our residents and visitors by providing opportunities to meet and socialise, building social cohesion and community resilience. Our community can learn practical skills and lend a hand to grow fresh food in the City, or plant native understorey in a park or nurture a patch of bushland. These programs create and support comfortable, green public spaces to walk, cycle, and enjoy the City. Participating in community greening connects residents and visitors with nature, even on their footpath, promoting a cool, calm and resilient City.

Community greening programs are delivered in line with existing policy documents including the Community gardens policy (2016) and Guidelines and Footpath gardening local approvals policy (2013). These documents are due for update and renewal to address governance requirements, risks, legislation, community feedback and align with new City strategies.

In response, the City has developed a suite of new and updated documents to holistically capture all community greening programs available to the community and supported by the City. The new documents aim to make participating in greening programs easier for the community, expand the City's support and provide clarity about requirements and responsibilities. These documents provide clear and consistent principles for greening activities supported by the City.

It is proposed to exhibit the draft Community greening framework, the draft Footpath and laneway gardens local approvals policy and the 3 supporting guidelines for a period of 42 days to obtain community feedback.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

- (A) Council approve for public exhibition the draft Community Greening Framework, updated draft Footpath and Laneway Gardens Local Approvals Policy, draft Footpath and Laneway Gardens Guidelines, draft Community Gardens Guidelines and draft Community Greening Volunteer Guidelines, as shown in Attachments B, C, D, E and F to the subject report
- (B) Council note that these documents will be placed on public exhibition for a period of 42 days
- (C) Council note that the the draft Community Greening Framework, updated draft Footpath and Laneway Gardens Local Approvals Policy, draft Footpath and Laneway Gardens Guidelines, draft Community Gardens Guidelines and draft Community Greening Volunteer Guidelines, including any recommended changes, will be reported to Council for adoption following the exhibition period
- (D) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive Officer to make minor editorial amendments for clarity or correction of drafting errors prior to exhibition of the draft documents in Attachments B, C, D, E and F to the subject report.

Attachments

- Attachment A.** Community Greening Framework Document Hierarchy
- Attachment B.** Draft Community Greening Framework
- Attachment C.** Draft Footpath and Laneway Gardens Local Approvals Policy
- Attachment D.** Draft Footpath Gardens Guidelines
- Attachment E.** Draft Community Gardens Guidelines
- Attachment F.** Draft Community Greening Volunteer Guidelines

Background

Community Greening Framework (new)

1. The draft Community greening framework outlines how the City will support community participation in greening the City, including community led initiatives and City volunteer programs. These include footpath gardens, community gardens, Sydney City Farm volunteers, Bushcare/Landcare volunteer groups, community greening events and a new Parkcare program. The City provides opportunities for community greening with different levels of commitment, time and involvement required from participants. Community members can select community greening activities suited to their interests, available time or experience.
2. The City provides different levels of approvals, guidance and support for community greening, depending on our responsibilities, such as land ownership and legislative obligations. The framework outlines the roles and responsibilities of the City and participants in greening programs and is supported by associated guidelines.
3. The Community greening framework is supported by associated Guidelines which provide additional detail for the community. The hierarchy of documents can be found in Attachment A to the subject report.
4. The Community greening framework at Attachment B to the subject report provides a range of programs suited to the diverse needs of the community and their interests, availability and abilities. The documents:
 - (a) address the community's desire and interest to participate and increase greening opportunities in the City
 - (b) provide clear guidance to the community on how to participate in greening the City, while maintaining safe and accessible public spaces
 - (c) ensure programs and activities are delivered in alignment with obligations under legislative requirements including the Local Government Act 1993, the Roads Act 1993 and the Work Health and Safety Act 2011
 - (d) clarify the support the City provides to the community including:
 - (i) a dedicated Community Greening, Gardens and Volunteering Coordinator to provide information, advice, guidance and support to individuals and groups participating in community greening
 - (ii) overseeing compliance and addressing non-compliance with policies and guidelines
 - (iii) providing maintenance and renewal of assets owned or managed by the City
 - (iv) promoting community greening using City communication channels including the corporate website, social media and newsletters
 - (v) providing donations of some plants and materials to support City volunteer activities, community garden groups and road closure gardens

- (vi) providing access to community greening education workshops and events
- (vii) providing personal accident and public liability insurance coverage to City volunteers aged over 18 years (Bushcare/Landcare, Sydney City Farm and City run community events)
- (viii) providing public liability insurance coverage for community garden groups operating under an agreement with the City on land owned or managed by the City
- (ix) providing public liability insurance coverage for complying footpath gardens, laneway gardens and road closure gardens.

Community Gardens Guidelines (updated)

- 5. The draft Community gardens guidelines at Attachment E to the subject report will replace the 2016 Community gardens policy and Guidelines.
- 6. Community gardens are situated throughout the local government area on Council owned or managed land (City land), and land managed by other organisations (non-City land).
- 7. The City currently supports 19 community gardens in our local area, with around 500 active members.
- 8. There are currently 13 community gardens on City land.
- 9. The City supports community gardens to become self-managed, well maintained, safe, accessible, and welcoming places for the enjoyment of the community.

Changes to the Community Gardens Guidelines

- 10. The updated Community gardens guidelines outline the different City support and requirements for community gardens located on City land and non-City land. This addresses feedback from community consultation that the 2016 policy and guidelines required more clarity.
- 11. The updated Community gardens guidelines propose that community gardens on City land will be designed, built and repaired by the City in line with other parks assets. Changes remove barriers to establishing new community gardens and streamline the site selection, funding, approval and delivery process and associated timeframes.
- 12. Changes proposed for community garden groups located on City land include:
 - (a) identification of 27 suitable sites for potential new community gardens on City land, subject to community consultation
 - (b) a streamlined standardised approval pathway to remove the requirement for individual group management plans and Council approval of new gardens
 - (c) for groups operating in accordance with a current legal agreement, City funded:
 - (i) design and construction of new community gardens in consultation with garden groups

- (ii) maintenance and repair of fixed garden infrastructure assets as required; and
 - (iii) expansion and renewal of existing community garden infrastructure based on asset condition, community need, City priorities and available funding.
- 13. The updated guidelines require new and existing community garden groups to incorporate as a not-for-profit legal entity (for example, an incorporated association) and enter into a legal agreement with the City that will provide a licence for use of City land for a community garden.
- 14. This approach, along with the City providing public notice of the proposed use of the land prior to entry into the agreement, is consistent with the Local Government Act 1993 in relation to the use and management of community land.
- 15. Incorporation is required as only legal entities can enter into legal agreements (for example, licences). It will also provide benefits for community garden groups such as having governance structures that support effective group management (for example, a constitution, management committee and annual general meetings), limiting the liability of members, and enabling the group to apply for grants.
- 16. Whilst the 2016 Community garden guidelines encouraged community garden groups to have a clear and identified legal structure, the benefits of incorporation were not clear to groups and most groups currently operating on City land remain unincorporated.
- 17. A 2-year transition period is proposed for existing community garden groups on City land to incorporate and enter into a legal agreement with the City.
- 18. Having a legal agreement with the City will provide long term security of tenure for community garden groups. The updated guidelines propose 5-year terms with an optional 5-year extension.
- 19. To simplify the process and ensure consistency of management, standardised legal agreements will be used which require community garden groups to operate in accordance with the Community gardens guidelines. This replaces the requirement for new community garden groups to develop their own management plans requiring City approval which historically has been a barrier to the creation of new groups.
- 20. The City will also provide public liability insurance for community garden groups on City land operating under a legal agreement with the City. This removes a cost and perceived barrier to incorporation identified in early consultation with community garden group convenors in February 2026. The City's provision of this coverage has been included in the City's public liability insurance policy.

Community Greening Volunteer Guidelines (new)

- 21. City volunteers in community greening programs contribute their time, effort, knowledge and skills to foster a greener, more sustainable city for future generations. City employees guide and oversee City volunteer activities. Community greening volunteer programs in the City include Sydney City Farm volunteers, Bushcare/Landcare volunteer groups and community greening events such as National Tree Day.

22. Volunteers with Sydney City Farm may participate in supervised volunteer working bees, as farmhand volunteers in small self-managed teams or as education and event volunteers. Over 300 volunteers lent a hand at Sydney City Farm last year.
23. Bushcare/Landcare volunteer groups enhance bushland on City land throughout the local government area, with 50 volunteers currently volunteering their time across 3 suburbs.
24. Community greening events engage the broader community in greening activities, such as National Tree Day which attracted over 150 attendees last year.
25. The draft Community greening volunteer guidelines at Attachment F to the subject report provide clear and consistent information regarding roles and responsibilities of the City and community greening volunteers. These Community greening volunteer guidelines:
 - (a) formalise existing arrangements, clarifying responsibilities and insurance coverage
 - (b) encourage activities aligned with current City strategies, plans and policies
 - (c) comply with the City's Work, Health and Safety requirements
 - (d) outline how volunteers can participate in existing programs and/or start a new Bushcare volunteer group or Parkcare site.
26. A new Parkcare program is proposed to respond to community interest in biodiversity volunteering opportunities. The program would be supervised by City staff. Parkcare would provide an opportunity for volunteers to nurture:
 - (a) local native vegetation in parks
 - (b) plantings and habitat features to support native wildlife
 - (c) pollination gardens to attract beneficial insects and pollinators
 - (d) educational plantings of native foods, or
 - (e) communal plantings of herbs and other edible plants (restricted to designated areas where growing edible plants is compatible with regular parks maintenance activities).

Footpath and Laneway Gardens Local Approvals Policy (revised) and Footpath and Laneway Gardens Guidelines (new)

27. The draft Footpath and laneway gardens local approvals policy (LAP) and Guidelines at Attachments C and D to the subject report will replace the 2013 Footpath gardens LAP, Garden beds checklist and Planter box checklist.
28. The draft LAP is a local approvals policy prepared in accordance with section 158 of the Local Government Act 1993 and specifies:
 - (a) the circumstances in which a person is not required to obtain a particular approval from the City

- (b) the criteria which the City must consider when determining whether or not to grant approval to a particular activity
 - (c) other matters relating to approvals.
- 29. The draft LAP sets out the circumstances and conditions under which the City will allow residents to undertake gardening within the road reserve, without seeking formal approval.
- 30. Footpath gardens increase community engagement and participation in achieving the City's street greening targets, while supporting urban biodiversity, wildlife habitat and sustainable living.
- 31. Approximately 40 footpath gardening checklists have been submitted to the City since Council adopted the current policy in 2013. City staff estimate there are hundreds of residents and businesses participating in footpath gardening in our local area without having lodged checklists with the City.
- 32. Footpath gardening has proven to be a low risk activity.
- 33. The City will continue to provide public liability insurance coverage for footpath gardens which comply with the requirements of the LAP and Footpath and laneway gardens guidelines.
- 34. Transport for NSW will be notified during the public exhibition period of the intent to include classified roads under the LAP.

Changes to the Footpath and Laneway Gardens Local Approvals Policy

- 35. The draft LAP will be supported by the draft Footpath and laneway gardens guidelines. The documents:
 - (a) remove requirements to submit a Footpath garden checklist and Footpath planter box checklist to the City, removing red tape and a perceived barrier to establishing footpath gardens
 - (b) respond to community interest by expanding opportunities for footpath gardens into laneways (greater than 3.2m in width) and existing road closures, increasing opportunities for participation
 - (c) include a referral pathway with next steps for footpath garden proposals outside the LAP requirements, with clear next steps for the community
 - (d) outline how the City will respond to occasional non-compliance with the policy and guidelines.

36. The draft LAP allows the community to establish footpath gardens, laneway gardens and road closure gardens without seeking formal approval from the City, so long as they comply with the requirements in the LAP. The draft LAP streamlines requirements for maintaining a consistent and predictable clear path of travel, clear of obstructions and trip hazards. Updated photo illustrations in the guidelines demonstrate achievable community greening which meets the City's requirements. Practical guidance is included for:
- (a) clear path of travel requirements aligned with the City's updated Outdoor dining policy, according to road classifications in the Sydney streets code
 - (b) placement of gardens adjacent the kerb line with a preference to keep the building line clear
 - (c) maintaining clearances around utilities, vehicle access, street furniture, pedestrian crossings, property entrances, bus stops and other access points
 - (d) considering the size and eventual weight of pots and raised garden beds once filled with soil, as these are considered temporary installations which can be moved to provide access if necessary (for example, for utilities) and for residents to clean.
37. Public liability insurance coverage will be extended to laneway gardens and road closure gardens which comply with the requirements of the LAP and Footpath and laneway garden guidelines.
38. The draft LAP includes a referral pathway for community greening initiatives outside the requirements of the LAP, for example, in narrow laneways (less than 3.2m wide), or requests for new road closures.
- (a) The City will require written evidence that all landowners and tenants affected by a permanent change in access agree to the project, before it is referred to the City for investigation and evaluation of feasibility.
 - (b) This provides clear next steps for community initiatives outside the scope of the draft LAP.

Key implications

Strategic alignment - Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision

39. Sustainable Sydney 2030-2050 Continuing the Vision renews the communities' vision for the sustainable development of the city to 2050. This program is aligned with the following strategic directions and objectives:
- (a) Direction 2 - A leading environmental performer - community greening programs enable our community to:
 - (i) increase green cover in our local area
 - (ii) connect with nature in the city to support health and wellbeing

- (iii) integrate nature with the urban landscape, by enhancing wildlife habitat and supporting healthy ecosystems.
 - (b) Direction 3 - Public places for all - these programs create and support comfortable, green public spaces to walk, cycle, meet and socialise.
 - (c) Direction 6 - An equitable and inclusive city - these programs support everyone to feel welcome and included in the city by:
 - (i) supporting and celebrating volunteers and promoting volunteer opportunities aligned with the interests and abilities of diverse community members.
 - (d) Direction 7 - Resilient and diverse communities – community greening programs increase community connections by promoting social inclusion and enabling connectedness reducing social isolation within and across communities.
40. The documents also contribute toward delivery of the Greening Sydney strategy and urban ecology strategic plan.

Organisational impact

41. Adoption of the draft Community greening framework and the draft Footpath and laneway gardens LAP will streamline processes for managing new community gardens and footpath gardens, optimising allocation of staff resources within the Community Greening team.

Risks

42. Community greening fits within the City's risk appetite.
43. The City's risk appetite statement notes that it will tolerate capital outlays attributable to innovation to meet community needs and provide better outcomes. Sufficient operational and capital budget has been included in the Long-Term Financial Plan to support the programs outlined in this report.
44. The City's risk appetite seeks to manage public spaces for the benefit of the community, whilst being prepared to implement change and embrace innovation. Footpath gardens in streets, laneways and road closures have become a characteristic feature of urban street greening. The Community greening framework, LAP and associated guidelines seeks to demonstrate compliant, high quality and inclusive community greening initiatives which are achievable while maintaining access to public spaces which provide benefits for the broader community.
45. The City is committed to the health, safety and wellbeing of our workers, residents, visitors and others who interact with our assets, operations and services. Community greening in public spaces prioritises public access and safety. Supervision and education are provided where required to enable safe participation in community greening programs. The new guidelines outline and clarify the role of participants and the City in ensuring a safe environment while undertaking community greening initiatives. The City has appropriate insurance coverage for the different community greening programs.

46. The City is committed to conducting our activities in full compliance with applicable laws, regulations and relevant industry standards. The new Community greening framework, LAP and associated guidelines ensure community greening initiatives and City volunteer programs align with legislative obligations including the Local Government Act 1993, Roads Act 1993, and the Work Health and Safety Act 2011.

Social / Cultural / Community

47. The City's community greening programs enhance urban life for all residents and visitors by providing opportunities to:
- (a) meet and socialise, building social cohesion and community resilience
 - (b) participate in lifelong learning and skills development
 - (c) connect with nature in public green spaces
 - (d) engage in outdoor physical activity
 - (e) make a positive contribution to environmental sustainability
 - (f) grow and harvest fresh food
 - (g) contribute to City programs donating fresh food to local food relief charities, enhancing bush restoration areas, and/or nurturing wildlife habitat in public green spaces.

Environmental

48. The City's community greening programs support environmental sustainability by encouraging:
- (a) cooler, calmer public green spaces with increased green cover
 - (b) sustainable water use
 - (c) composting of organic waste
 - (d) growing fresh food locally
 - (e) improving local biodiversity
 - (f) bush restoration, community planting events and biodiversity plantings in public places.
49. The documents contribute to actions within the Greening Sydney strategy and the urban ecology strategic action plan.

Financial implications

50. Community greening programs and renewal of City owned community greening assets are funded from within the City's existing operational and capital budgets and forward estimates that form part of the City's long-term financial plan.

Relevant legislation

51. Local Government Act 1993.
52. Protection of the Environment and Operations Act 1997 and Protection of the Environment Operations (General) Regulation 2022.
53. Roads Act 1993.
54. Work Health and Safety Act 2011 and Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017.

Critical dates / Time frames

55. Key dates:

Council approval to go on public exhibition	24 August 2026
Public exhibition period	6 weeks - concluding October 2026
Evaluation of feedback and preparation of final versions of documents	November - December 2026
Documents reported back to Council for consideration of approval and adoption of policy documents	Early 2027

Public consultation

56. City staff have undertaken early targeted community consultation, briefing participants about the draft Community greening framework across our community greening programs. This included:
- (a) early consultation with community garden groups in February 2026, holding 2 face-to-face public information meetings to explain proposed changes to the Community garden guidelines, prior to the broader consultation on the related policy documents
 - (b) quarterly meetings with representatives of local Bushcare/Landcare volunteer groups, briefing volunteers about the new Community greening volunteer guidelines
 - (c) meetings with regular Sydney City Farm volunteers, briefing volunteers about the new Community greening volunteer guidelines.
57. Community engagement to review City programs, plans and strategies have also informed these updated documents.
- (a) In early 2025, City staff held focus group meetings with local Bushcare/Landcare volunteer groups about their involvement and suggested priority actions for the updated City of Sydney Urban ecology strategic action plan. Volunteers were also invited to participate in a follow up community survey in early 2026.
 - (b) In late 2020, the City undertook an extensive review of the City's Community gardens policy and asked the community about their involvement and interest in community gardens, and their importance particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - (i) The City received over 250 pieces of feedback about the importance of community gardens.
 - (ii) Participants wanted access to educational opportunities for community garden members.
 - (iii) Participants wanted the City of Sydney to provide infrastructure and materials for community gardens.
 - (c) Sydney City Farm volunteers were consulted as part of the Sydney City Farm business plan update consultation in 2020. Volunteers were asked what they most valued about Sydney City Farm, and responses included:
 - (i) spending time outdoors in nature
 - (ii) learning about growing organic food
 - (iii) growing fresh food for people in need.
58. This report seeks Council approval to place the draft Community greening framework documents on public exhibition for 42 days from September until mid-October 2026.

59. Public exhibition will include:

- (a) a community survey published on the Sydney Your Say web page and advertised via the City's communication channels
- (b) notice of the exhibition will be published on the City's website, and notices will be installed at Community gardens on City land
- (c) 2 face-to-face public information sessions to seek feedback on the draft documents
- (d) contacting community members who have submitted footpath gardening checklists to the City to inform them the updated Footpath and laneway gardens LAP and Guidelines are on public exhibition once the exhibition period commences.

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