



Victoria Community Gardens

Overview Report
by Justin McCann



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Process

On January 15th, I met with Matthew Kemshaw and Tim Fryatt of LifeCycles Project Society, and Virginie Lavallee-Picard, Food Systems Coordinator from the City of Victoria Parks Department. We discussed the current systems for community garden development, and how LifeCycles and the City can better serve the needs of the people working to create and sustain community food production spaces. An online survey was designed and distributed to all community gardens in Victoria, seeking information about current garden membership, barriers to entry and issues of accessibility. I then researched broadly the application process and policies that the City provides for aspiring urban farmers and community gardeners, and tried to identify and analyze areas of success as well as barriers to future development.



List of Current Community Gardens

The City of Victoria has 7 commons gardens including:

- Banfield Commons and Vic West Community Tea Garden
- Wark Street Commons and The People's Apothecary
- James Bay New Horizons Pollinator Gardens
- Spring Ridge Commons
- Fairfield Community Garden
- North Jubilee Spirit Garden
- Rockland Woodland Garden

As well as 7 allotment gardens:

- Burnside Allotment Garden
- Earthbound Community Garden
- Fernwood Allotment Garden
- Montreal Street Community Garden
- Neighbourhood Garden of All Sorts
- Rain or Shine Community Garden
- Yates Street Community Gardens

The most common amenities across all gardens tend to be communal facilities, including:

- Communal herb gardens (7)
- Tool sheds (6)
- Community gathering area (6)
- Native plant & Ornamental gardens (4)
- Some water feature (4)

These are often required features of commons gardens.

Allotment Gardens: Need for More Growing Space

Of the 14 survey requests sent out, we received 10 responses back. We made sure to seek out the below information from every allotment garden in the City.

| | Number of Allotment Plots | Number of People Currently on Waitlist | Average Time Spent on Waitlist |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|--|--|
| Neighbourhood Gardens of All Sorts | 18 | 30 | Due to low light, garden has struggled to keep people for more than 1 growing season |
| Burnside Allotment Garden | 23 | 40 | 2 years for those in neighborhood, longer for those outside |
| Yates Street Community Garden | 60 | 30 | No Data, only started last year |
| Fernwood Allotment Garden | 20 | 20 | 10 years |
| Montreal Street Community Garden | 54 | 30 | 2 years |
| Rayn or Shine Community Garden | 9 | 10 | 2 years or more |
| Earthbound Community Garden | 20 | 20 | 10 Years |
| TOTAL | 215 | 170 | |

Waitlists: Well established community gardens tend to have only a few plots that become available each year. These few gardens have long waitlists. Often when plots come available, many people “at the front of the line” are no longer interested or around. The reputation for long waitlists is a barrier to participation for many, which prevents people from even trying.

Land inventory: The City provides a comprehensive map detailing the land inventoried for garden use. Community gardeners have opportunities to explore potential sites of future community gardens - this map is a helpful guide.

<http://vicmap.victoria.ca/CommunityGardens/>

Description of Operations

Organization of community gardens varies neighbourhood to neighbourhood, each one has support and/or funding coming in form from a variety of sources. Any garden operating on City owned land must partner with a nonprofit group who is legally able to hold the license of occupation and carry liability insurance. A majority of respondents (7 out of 10) partner organization was a local neighbourhood association, the minority were other non-profit organizations not specifically tied to the local neighbourhood. Additional responsibilities of partner non-profit organizations may include: administrative support, management of finances, and supervision of repairs and maintenance. Gardens are run and maintained by dedicated volunteers, who are overseen by a steering committee or board, who are often made up of members of the partner organization and key garden volunteers. The City of Victoria offers 6 types of project-oriented grants open to community organizations to apply and receive funding. These include the Volunteer Coordinator Grant, Micro grants and the many new Strategic Plan grants. Other major sources of funding for community gardens comes from member fees, community led fundraisers, and private donations from local businesses. The City also provides a handful of valuable services to approved gardens, including: scheduled leaf mulch deliveries, fence installation and water subsidies. Together, the City, community garden/ residents associations and other partner organizations are working together to navigate the unique and shifting challenges of urban food production.

Barriers and Challenges

Respondents to our survey identified 3 primary barriers to the start-up and on-going maintenance of thriving community gardens:

- 1) Lack of volunteer engagement
- 2) Lack of proper support and funding for amenities for garden maintenance
- 3) An overly strenuous application process

Almost half of the respondents reported that the city had imposed excessive bureaucratic barriers in the initial phases of community members expressing interest in creating a garden. Many functional challenges arise that are unforeseeable in the planning phases, so adaptability in the part of the City and partner organizations to handle these issues are needed. Most frequently volunteers are concerned with the safety of their garden after they learn the level of security required to ensure their investments are properly protected. This means adequate fence heights, secure locking systems, sheltered from animals and possibly vandals, and a slew of other day-to-day upkeep (overgrowth, sunlight, weather buffering). These are all post-implementation factors that are becoming prevalent to both the residents as well as the City, and will require creative cooperative efforts.

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