

## Report on Community Garden Partnerships Between Non-Profits and Municipalities

Prepared for Nanaimo Community Gardens Society by Kristen Hughes and Anne Gougeon

### **Nanaimo Community Gardens Society**

[www.nanaimocommunitygardens.ca](http://www.nanaimocommunitygardens.ca)

250-816-GROW (4769)

When I looked at partnerships between community gardens and municipalities, I examined the level of responsibility each party took on, their mandates, and their programs. I found that the way these partnerships functioned did not necessarily match some of our beliefs and expectations. Clarifying these differences helped shape my understanding of the community gardens movement and make recommendations tailored to our area.

I found variety in the balance of responsibilities between community gardens and municipalities. Partnership arrangements are further varied by the degree of centralization or decentralization of control in an area's community gardens. In some cases a municipality provides funds and staff and drives the program, centralizing operations such as gardener registration. In other cases, there is a centralized community gardens program that operates all garden sites for a regional district, and funds itself. In still other cases, especially in large population areas, numerous community gardens operate independently (for example, at the neighbourhood level or to serve a segment of society such as youth) or they operate in loose affiliation with each other. Independent gardens appear to receive more limited levels of support from local government. Niche city programs and non-profit groups also exist that promote gardening in communities through demonstration gardens and workshops, without actually providing any plots for individuals to garden. These niche gardens come in a variety of partnership models.

I first considered the municipality of Seattle. The government acts in the role of facilitator, but transfers delivery and maintenance of community projects to the volunteer sector. The government supplies large and small project funds, but these funds are only available to neighbourhood groups who propose a project and deliver the project in a less than a year. The government does not provide ongoing funding to community organizations, contrary to my original perception of their system.

### **P-Patch Trust**

(425) 329-1601

[p.patch.trust@ppatchtrust.org](mailto:p.patch.trust@ppatchtrust.org)

[www.ppatchtrust.org](http://www.ppatchtrust.org)

P-Patch Trust is a non-profit community garden land trust that partners with the City of Seattle's P-Patch Program. P-Patch Trust engages in advocacy for low-income gardeners, promotes organic gardening, supports food bank contributions, and purchases gardens as a conservancy measure. Besides purchasing land outright, they also pursue conservation easements and donated leases from property owners.

The Trust raises funds, and receives individual and corporate donations. Donors can designate funds through their workplace giving campaign and receive company matches. Fundraisers include Chef in the Garden and Blues for Food.

The Trust's Gardenship Fund helps low-income gardeners pay their plot fees.

The Trust offers organic gardening classes in conjunction with Seattle Tilth, Seattle Public Utilities, Grant Central Station, and the city's P-Patch Program.

P-Patch Trust, the P-Patch Program, and the Seattle Housing Authority have a partnership called the Cultivating Communities Program, which facilitates community gardens, a farmers' market, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) in public housing communities. The Program and community councils direct garden development. Three of the gardens are for youth. For the CSAs, resident gardeners grow produce and divide the income from sale of the CSA subscriptions, sold through local churches to Seattle households with marketing assistance from Earth Ministry.

The P-Patch Trust partners with Lettuce Link (below).

The P-Patch Trust website identifies the "vagaries of politics," economic cycles, and population growth as challenges to its operations. Its gardens and programs are increasing.

A link to their Annual Report can be found at <http://www.ppatchtrust.org/About.html#Report>

### **City of Seattle P-Patch Gardening Program**

(206) 684-0264

[p-patch\\_don@seattle.gov](mailto:p-patch_don@seattle.gov)

<http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ppatch/gardening.htm>

The Program administers the plot fee collection and wait list. The program loans some gardening tools. Gardeners receive fertilizer and water. The Program has fifty-five community garden locations. The Program will help community members start new community garden spaces through site evaluation, soil testing, negotiation of leases or help dealing with the government agency who owns the property, help to secure funding for purchase through public funding or private foundations, and so on. The Program matches gardeners' labour with grants. The program provides advice and technical assistance as well as dispute resolution. The program leads groups through the garden design process, and provides a forum for discussion through the Site Coordinators Committee. Program staff monitors the gardens.

Gardens are maintained by community members, who are required to volunteer 8 hours per year. Garden leadership groups coordinate tasks such as work parties and coordination with the Program and the P-Patch Trust.

Food security is one of the goals of the Program

(<http://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods/ppatch/communityfoodsecurity.htm>). The P-Patch

Program serves on the Seattle King County Acting Food Policy Council

(<http://king.wsu.edu/foodandfarms/foodpolicycouncil.htm>). Besides community gardens, the

City of Seattle also supports market gardens (<http://seattlemarketgardens.org/>) and youth gardening (<http://www.cultivatingyouth.org/>).

The P-Patch Trust website states that "In 1994 the City Comprehensive Plan called for a community garden in every Urban Village," which indicates policy support of community gardens from local government.

### **Lettuce Link**

(206) 694-6777

[lettucelink@solid-ground.org](mailto:lettucelink@solid-ground.org)

<http://www.solid-ground.org/Programs/Nutrition/Lettuce/Pages/default.aspx>

Solid Ground's staff and volunteers provide produce, seeds, seedlings, supplies, assistance, and information to low-income Seattle residents through their Lettuce Link program. Organic vegetables produced by residents in P-Patch community gardens, private gardens, and organic fruit gathered by volunteer gleaners from neighbourhood trees is delivered by volunteers to agencies that run food banks and hot meal programs. Seeds and seedlings are given directly to individuals. The program uses their Giving Garden to teach nearby residents and school children gardening and cooking. Lettuce Link publishes the guide *Gardening for Good Nutrition*. The program receives donations of seeds and money, as well as produce and volunteer hours. The parent non-profit organization, Solid Ground, receives corporate donations.

I do not feel that the Seattle example is good for our needs, because the government's main motivator for spending on community gardens appears to be race relations. The primary criteria for securing funds is that a proposal's heading read "race relations and social justice." I do not think that this motive is a transferable argument to Nanaimo. The United States has a security and policing problem, and eruptions into urban violence is an issue. Nanaimo does not have the same pressure. Race relations is not a lever to move the local government.

My research shows that the appropriate strategy, in requesting funding from local government, is two-pronged. We should key proposals to the city's mandate to respond to public demand for community gardens, and to its mandate to address food security. The city wants to position itself as a healthy city with public green space that lends itself to gardening communally and developing strong social ties. The city also recently adopted a new community plan with an objective of food security, to improve access to food. Community gardens have potential to reduce the need for certain costs to the government, such as policing, social services, and damage caused by aimless roving people looking to meet their needs. Community Gardens do not just supply the opportunity to grow food but relationships and skill building. We might prevent the creation of more homelessness. The price of housing rentals has moved upward so that 70-90 percent of income is going to housing in some cases, leaving little over for food. Local advocates see how lack of food causes crisis in lives which progresses from loss to more loss. Many needy people can not access local free food due to the times and locations. They also need more than the Food Bank bag of tuna, beans and pasta. Some will not face the perceived shame. The need for food can be expected to be more of a burden that will impact the city if they do not address it. Healthy diet, or the lack of it, impacts health of youth and their ability to learn and become productive adults. Statistics show one in five children in BC live in poverty. The problem costs the City now and, without community gardens, costs will grow in the future.

Strong voter pressure is driving these government mandates. What I see in Canada is grassroots interest pushing the expansion of community gardens. The tremendous resurgence in the last ten years points to this. People want to garden. In addition, people are concerned politically: they have the vision that food security is a problem coming that we need to prepare for.

Enlarging Food bank donations is a possible future expansion for Nanaimo Community Gardens, but not now. We need to improve the garden and secure its future first. We see the garden as a partner to the food bank, and support low-income members by allowing them to work to get their

membership through volunteer hours. The garden has been used as therapy project for people in treatment centers. There is at least one example of someone whose experience at Nanaimo Community Gardens leading to employment in gardening; the person was previously on government assistance.

I turned my attention to examples in Canada. There is a very strong community garden movement in this country, particularly a lot of new growth in the last ten years. I looked at several examples in large urban centers. Their common feature was some facilitation by senior executives of local government. The focus, however, is on starting new gardens, not supplying yearly funding to community garden staff.

Edmonton, for example, gives grants for new garden startups. The City of Edmonton examined previous community gardening efforts and found that in time things had died off because all the gardeners were relating to the city as individuals and not relating to fellow gardeners. The movement eventually died out. Conversely now with startup grants, Edmonton has experienced 1000 percent growth in the last ten years, and has over 60 community gardens at present. I noted that gardeners need to be linked to one another for a community garden to work well.

### **Edmonton Community Garden Network (CGN)**

(780) 221-1128 or (780) 447-9600

[info@edmcommunitygardens.org](mailto:info@edmcommunitygardens.org)

<http://www.edmcommunitygardens.org/>

CGN is a non-profit society that operates gardens in partnership with other non-profits. These partners include municipal departments, social service agencies, churches, or housing cooperatives. CGN is supported by agencies and organizations.

CGN promotes food security, physical activity, and social interaction. Its primary focus is the establishment and maintenance of allotment gardens.

Although its website states that CGN is made up of volunteers, it has a paid job posting for the position of project assistant.

Educational programs were delivered at CGN gardens, but the website was unclear who determines the programming and who teaches the classes. The volunteer page of the website solicits volunteer workshop facilitators.

For each garden, a volunteer individual or committee is responsible for being the Garden Coordinator. The coordinator's duties are considerable, and encompass a number of tasks that in Seattle would fall to city staff. Duties include representing the garden to the media and the public, and building relationships with individuals and organizations that could potentially support the garden. The coordinator ensures that gardeners and volunteers follow garden by-laws, and supervises planting and maintenance including maintenance of signs and equipment. The coordinator assists gardeners by planning the site, mediating disputes, providing information, and assisting those unable to plant or harvest. The coordinator recruits, trains, and manages volunteers. The coordinator develops sources for items such as seeds, plants, mulch, lumber, soil, and amendments. The coordinator records garden progress and reports to the organizing committee.

The City and Capital Regional Housing have provided garden sites. Local builders provide recycled wood. Volunteers source tools at garage sales. CGN solicits discounts for soil and garden and building materials from local businesses.

### **The City of Edmonton Community Gardens**

(780) 496-6997

[http://www.edmonton.ca/environmental/conservation\\_landscaping/community-gardens.aspx](http://www.edmonton.ca/environmental/conservation_landscaping/community-gardens.aspx)

Information on the site is minimal, and does not provide details about the city's partnership with CGN.

### **Community Garden Council of Waterloo Region**

[Community-garden-council-of-waterloo-region@googlegroups.com](mailto:Community-garden-council-of-waterloo-region@googlegroups.com)

<http://groups.google.ca/group/community-garden-council-of-waterloo-region/about?hl=en>

The Community Garden Council of Waterloo Region is an umbrella organization of community gardens. The various gardens are sponsored by municipal government, organizations, churches, community centres, public interest groups, housing co-operatives, and neighbourhood associations. Here again, the community gardens received gifts of land from local government but not on-going operational support.

### **Resources of Public Health in Region of Waterloo**

(519) 883-2004 ext. 5336

<http://chd.region.waterloo.on.ca/web/health.nsf/c56e308f49bfeb7885256abc0071ec9a/19e339ad197a415185256b1b0058e770%21OpenDocument#Community%20Gardens%20in%20Kitchener>

This government site refers to the Council and also the Waterloo Region Community Garden Network. Whether these are the same organization is not clear. The Network focuses on public education, and offers free gardening workshops. The Network links people and resources to community gardens. The Network aims to provide people with physical activity and a sense of community, green space, access to food, and reduction of fossil fuel use through local food production.

The Waterloo Region has many community gardens, with contact information given for each community garden. From the list on the above website, the community gardens appear to operate independently and differ widely in their aims, resources, funding, plot fees, and services.

### **Central Okanagan Community Gardens**

(250) 862-8825

[cocg@silk.net](mailto:cocg@silk.net)

[www.centralokanagancommunitygardens.ca](http://www.centralokanagancommunitygardens.ca)

I kept looking for an example that would motivate our local government. I found the Central Okanagan Community Gardens Society (COCG). Their region is closer in size to ours and located in our province and so I feel the Society would be a persuasive example. (Community gardens as a rule operate at a ratio to the size of the city they're in.) When I contacted them, the COCG was preparing a proposal to their local regional district. They emailed to us (Nanaimo Community Gardens) the research they had prepared to implement or guide their proposal. They are working to insert themselves into discussion with local government about public policy that will be presented to developers, specifically policy giving developers the option to create community gardens for the green space in their projects.

COCG fosters food security, community, education, and established garden sites through partnerships with the City of Kelowna, the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen, agencies, residents, and donors. Gardens have been funded by a Provincial Spirit Grant and

Community Action Health Grant. Grants have also come from the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, the Diggers and Weeders, Canadian Federation of University Women, and the Central Okanagan Foundation. Local churches have donated or leased land. The City of Kelowna Parks Department and the City of Kelowna proper have donated land, and so has a local business.

Each of COCG's six gardens has a volunteer coordinator over it. The coordinator has many responsibilities: to collect fees, assign plots, and distribute keys; record information, including contact information on gardeners; ensures annual agreements are signed and dated (the information provided by COCG is ambiguous about whether these agreements are between land owners and the COCG, or the COCG and gardeners); distribute correspondence such as newsletters to gardeners; attend meetings and liaise with COCG Board; organize biannual cleanups; repair or replace garden implements; obtain supplies and submit receipts to Board; coordinate maintenance of garden structures (no information on who does maintenance); enforce garden guidelines; and liaise with paid coordinator, if any.

### **Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS)**

(250) 492-0237

[info@rdos.bc.ca](mailto:info@rdos.bc.ca)

[www.rdos.bc.ca](http://www.rdos.bc.ca)

COCG is seeking a paid coordinator from RDOS, at 0.5 staff person. The paid coordinator would liaise with the COCG Board, provide volunteer coordinators with lists of equipment and materials, supervise construction of new gardens in cooperation with the Board and the volunteer coordinator, liaise with municipal departments, oversee a standard registration process for gardeners, field public inquiries, train and supervise volunteer coordinators, visit garden sites regularly, provide gardening assistance to volunteer coordinators, manage all garden compost systems, and contribute to the COCG newsletter.

### **LifeCycles**

[info@lifecyclesproject.ca](mailto:info@lifecyclesproject.ca)

[www.lifecyclesproject.ca](http://www.lifecyclesproject.ca)

I discovered there has been a lot of youth involvement in community gardening. LifeCycles started in Victoria as an exchange of ideas between countries by teenagers. The gardens' objective of giving purpose to youths' lives has produced a successful working model that has been accepted in other communities. LifeCycles provides youth leadership roles and internships. LifeCycles educates through high school conferences, elementary school programs, school gardens, and community workshops. LifeCycles assesses potential sites, creates plans, creates model gardens and demonstration sites, and matches backyards with people who want to garden. Their HomeGrown Gardens program provides supplies, training, and practical on-going help to backyard gardeners. Volunteers grow and distribute produce to food banks and community centres, and also glean fruit from trees. LifeCycles funds entrepreneurial ventures that promote local food systems. LifeCycles publishes gardening manuals and education material for individuals, teachers, and students, as well as reports and research papers.

LifeCycles identifies commercial development of open space as a challenge to their operations. LifeCycles receives funding from a number of government agencies, funds and foundations, First Nations, and businesses. Local mills donate wood ends for raised beds. Local seed farmers donate seeds and transplants. The website does not solicit donations directly from individuals.

LifeCycles participates in the collaborative group Capital Region Food and Agriculture Initiative Roundtable (CR-FAIR) to work for food security.

Annual report: [http://www.lifecyclesproject.ca/about\\_us/annual\\_reports.php](http://www.lifecyclesproject.ca/about_us/annual_reports.php)

### **Victoria Compost Education Centre (GVCEC)**

(250) 386-WORM

[info@compost.bc.ca](mailto:info@compost.bc.ca)

[www.compost.bc.ca/](http://www.compost.bc.ca/)

The Victoria Compost Education Centre provides composting and organic gardening education to local residents. GVCEC delivers educational programs to students, clubs, and groups either on site or at their own demonstration site. They provide site tours and slide presentations to groups and clubs. To individuals, GVCEC teaches workshops that range from free and basic, affordable and two hours long, or costly and multi-week. Topics cover all aspects of composting as well as mason bees, city chickens, mushrooms, permaculture, and water management. Fact sheets and tutorials on composting are available on their website and in print. GVCEC operates mobile displays seasonally (late winter through fall) at locations such as malls, garden centres, farmers' markets, and fairs. It also operates a lending library for members, runs a compost hotline, and answers email inquiries. They sell composting supplies at subsidized rates to community groups, and composting starter kits to the public. They also sell seeds. Their website includes a shop section which allows visitors to see items; purchase is in person. GVCEC has a paid staff, as well as a board, volunteers, and club members. Club members get discounts on workshops. Volunteers complete a Compost Educator Program, similar to a master gardener program, and then staff the mobile displays, make presentations and show slides, do school workshops, maintain the demonstration site, assist garden visitors, and assist in the office. Site maintenance includes creating signage, preparing kits for sale and building composters, collecting vegetable scraps from neighbourhoods, and gardening. Staff handles development, promotion, planning, management and training of volunteers, and budget reports. Staff is responsible for the demonstration site's structural maintenance, which is considerable because of the various systems: composting, rainwater catchment, living roof, native and vegetable gardens, tool sheds, storage, and greenhouse. Staff liaises with growers, community groups, and local government.

GVCEC solicits red wiggler worms from residents and gives \$40 charitable receipts per pound in return. They hold an annual plant sale. GVCEC solicits donations of money from the public, including bequests and securities, as well as goods and services. Online money donations go through the organization Canada Helps ([www.canadahelps.org](http://www.canadahelps.org)).

The website makes no mention of where the startup capital came from or of any specific partnerships with local government, other than a reference in a job opening that the GVCEC does partner with local government. GVCEC partners with local seed growers.

### **City of Vancouver, Community Services: Social Planning**

[social.planning@vancouver.ca](mailto:social.planning@vancouver.ca)

<http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/initiatives/foodpolicy/projects/2010gardens.htm>

Vancouver City Councilors put out a challenge to create 2010 new community garden plots by 2010. The City maintains a central registry of community gardens, puts individuals in contact with community gardens, provides city-owned land, and sources land for potential gardeners. The City operates the Grow a Row, Share a Row program in which volunteers produce food for

the Greater Vancouver Food Bank Society and Neighbourhood Houses. Individual growers take produce to drop off sites (usually a Neighbourhood House), so the City's role appears to be mostly promotional.

The City of Vancouver staff partnered with the Food Policy Council and community members to inventory land available for community gardens, then analyze sites.

The City developed operational guidelines for community gardens on city-owned land. To get city land, a community garden must hold at least one of a number of objectives: to provide plots to people who don't have them; to demonstrate gardening; to promote biodiversity and local food production; to grow food for charitable donation; and/or to represent community diversity.

Under the guidelines, the City will provide access to information on the development and operation of community gardens, help groups find land, and help develop an umbrella organization for the creation of new gardens and support for existing ones. The City will prepare a garden site on city land for its first season only, by removing vegetation, adding compost, and bringing water to the site. The City is not responsible for development or maintenance after that. Leases between the City and a non-profit are usually for a period of five years, and may be revoked by the City with 30 days notice. City staff approves the garden plan, which is subject to some restrictions such as the inclusion of an ornamental perimeter garden. The community garden must report allotment fees to the City. The guidelines specify some access issues, such as plot allotment based on a wait list on a first come, first serve basis, preference for area residents, and preference to gardeners with no other garden access.

The City does not appear to support community gardens located off city land, other than promotion through the 2010 Challenge.

The City of Vancouver approved a Health By-law amendment to permit hobby beekeeping and developed a set of guidelines. The BC Ministry of Agriculture and Lands registers hobby beekeepers, and registration is compulsory.

The City of Vancouver participates with citizens in the Vancouver Food Policy Council for food security and the local food economy.

Gardens started by the independent organization City Farmer, through its Sharing Backyards program, are eligible for 2010 Challenge status.

The City's Social Planning department's report

([http://vancouver.ca/COMMSVCS/socialplanning/initiatives/foodpolicy/tools/pdf/Growing\\_Space\\_Rpt.pdf](http://vancouver.ca/COMMSVCS/socialplanning/initiatives/foodpolicy/tools/pdf/Growing_Space_Rpt.pdf)) identified the following cost benefits to municipal government from urban agriculture: reduced storm water management and reduced waste management fees. The report also noted that urban agriculture reduced emissions and transportation costs, which are within the City's mandate.

The City identified property development and lack of available land as challenges to community gardens.

### **Vancouver Parks Board – Community Gardens**

(604) 257-8400

[pbcomment@vancouver.ca](mailto:pbcomment@vancouver.ca)

<http://vancouver.ca/parks/parks/comgardn.htm>

The Parks Board makes park lands available to a number of community gardens, who individually administer the gardens in accordance with the Park Board's community garden policy which is essentially the same as the City's operational guidelines.

The above phone number and email address are for the Parks Board generally; the website contains contact information for each community garden.

**City Farmer, Canada's Office of Urban Agriculture**

(604) 685-5832

[cityfarm@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:cityfarm@interchange.ubc.ca)

[www.cityfarmer.info](http://www.cityfarmer.info)

City Farmer runs a compost hotline and demonstration garden in Vancouver, workshops, tours, a You Tube channel, and an extensive website with articles, slides, and other educational and promotional material. It also runs the Sharing Backyards program

([www.sharingbackyards.com](http://www.sharingbackyards.com)), matching potential gardeners with homeowners.

No information is provided about funding or partnerships, although a news article stated that City Farmer and the City of Vancouver partnered to distribute worm composters.

Due to my research, I suggest we start out asking the city for some non-budgetary items. There has been a lot of activity in the local newspaper concerning the controlling or reining in of local spending. City councilors have not even taken their expected wage increase as part of this movement. Therefore, I think it would be important at this time to start our requests with items that do not require further expenditure. I think there are many items that would be very helpful to our community garden's food security plans that would only require the city's cooperation. For example, access to advertising. We could have a glass case at the city pool filled with items and promotional artifacts that would entice and encourage people to become involved as a participant, volunteer, or donor. We could ask the city for a statement of partnership, to consider us part of their disaster management plan and food security policy. We should also seek the ability to have free water and the use of city-controlled land, and request that the city make compost available to vegetable gardeners.

I judge it unlikely that the city will provide on-going funding. This outlook is based both the current economic climate and the current pattern in community garden-municipal government partnerships happening across the country (funding concrete, visible projects that show where the money went as opposed to salaries that would keep a local non-profit going). There are some things that are obtainable but secure on-going funding for the organization's operating cost is very likely not one of them.