

Sunshine Coast Community Gardens Guidelines



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Disclaimer

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The *Community Gardens Guidelines* is a pilot document drafted for community feedback and trial implementation.

Purpose

These organisational guidelines set out the requirements for community groups implementing Sunshine Coast Council's *Community Garden's Policy*, specifically they outline:

- different types of community gardens
- roles of responsibilities of community garden groups
- initial tenure arrangements, and
- the procedure for community groups starting a new community garden.

These guidelines outline a basis for communication and partnership between stakeholders and provide a rationale for decision making that ensures consistency in dealing with enquiries relating to potential publicly accessible community gardens on council owned or managed land within the region.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the *Community Gardens Policy*.

Objectives

The objectives of these guidelines aim to:

- assist the *Community Gardens Policy* in providing a consistent, equitable and transparent approach to the processing of enquiries relating to publicly accessible community gardens on council owned or managed land
- achieve strategic goals set within the *Open Space Strategy* and *Community Gardens Policy*
- deliver a wide range of environmental, social and educational benefits for Sunshine Coast communities
- ensure community gardens are well managed

- enable the development of productive relationships between council and community garden groups
- encourage cross organisational cooperation in the development of community gardens and management of community garden groups
- link the development of community gardens to other regional policy and strategic goals, and
- support the attainment of Sunshine Coast Council *Corporate Plan* goals through Ecological Sustainability and Health and Wellbeing and Social Cohesion.

Scope

The guidelines respond to community garden groups wishing to establish and manage a community garden within the Sunshine Coast Regional Council Local Government Area on council owned or managed land, for the purpose of growing and learning to grow fresh food produce.

Community Gardens Policy Statement

As sighted within the *Community Gardens Policy*, community gardens are unique forms of public open space which are managed by the community primarily for the production of food and to contribute to the development of a sustainable urban environment. They are places for learning and sharing about sustainable living practices, and for community building through shared activities.

Community gardening is a valuable recreational activity that contributes to the health and well-being of the wider community and provides a wide range of environmental, social and educational benefits.

Guiding Principles

Enhanced wellbeing: Our community has access to open space that encourages a more active and healthy lifestyle. Well located and attractive parks increase the capacity and

motivation of the community to participate and become more involved. These active spaces are balanced with places to escape our busy lifestyles and urban form, giving opportunities to reflect and connect with people and nature.

Community involvement and partnerships:

Strong partnerships and alliances with community organisations achieve shared use and common goals. Community engagement and participation in planning and management strengthens social capital, fosters inclusion and builds community resilience.

Guidelines Introduction

For the purposes of these Guidelines, community gardens are: "...places where people come together to grow fresh food, to learn, relax and make new friends."¹

Social interaction and food production are usually the two main reasons stated for the establishment of community gardens. Activities beyond food production encourage community gardeners to participate in making the space multifunctional.

Community gardens present diverse opportunities for social interaction and community education and encourage an urban community's food security as well as potentially improving users' health through increased fresh vegetable consumption and providing a venue for exercise.

Different types of Community Gardens

There are a number of different types of community gardens on land owned or managed by council. The most common forms are:

- Community gardens with a mixture of allotments for each member and some shared areas.

- Communal gardens where the entire garden is managed collectively. Some examples of communal gardens are food forests (which include structured layers of plants such as edible groundcovers, shrubs and trees).
- Verge gardens where the garden beds are established on the nature strip and managed collectively by a group of local residents.
- Edible landscapes incorporated into local parks.

Community Management of Gardens

Community gardens should be established and managed by the community, council's role in the management of these facilities is to be a key stakeholder who can potentially provide advice and support on governance, structure and role responsibilities.

For community gardens to operate effectively, the needs and values of all relevant must be considered and valued.

Community gardens should be established and managed by the community; however this must be undertaken in such a way the needs of all stakeholders are taken into account.

Financial Support to Community Gardens

Funding is critical for the long-term success of any community garden project. Community gardens should be planned with the goal of long term financial sustainability so they are not dependent on short term sources of funding such as grants or sponsorship from partnering organisations. Being financially independent may also increase the feeling of empowerment and security as participants manage more aspects of the community gardens themselves.

However, support during the initial development of community gardens may be required to assist community groups towards developing community gardens in a viable and sustainable way.

¹ (Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network, 2010)

Council may be able to assist community groups in developing external grant applications and internal council grant applications. Under the current council grants programs, garden groups can apply for support towards: attaining equipment, plants, mulch, compost, materials, signage and educational materials. Details of council's grants programs can be obtained via council's website at <http://www.sunshinecoast.qld.gov.au/> then link through the Community Support portal.

In some instances additional support may be required to help community groups manage the unforeseen. In consideration of this, council may also consider funding the urgent repair of items that pose a significant safety risk on land owned or managed by council.

Funding for all these items will depend upon budget constraints and demand for resources and should not be relied upon by participants in community gardens.

Responsibilities of Community Gardeners

Community gardeners are responsible for maintaining their garden so the health and safety of the surrounding community is not adversely impacted. In particular, gardeners are responsible for ensuring that:

- the site is maintained to a standard outlined within lease guidelines (i.e. pose no risk to users or surrounding residents)
- they are also responsible for the maintenance of improvements and the site, and the costs of rent and services including, water, sewerage, electricity, waste, levies etc.
- they cooperate and manage effective relationships with the surrounding neighbourhood, partnering organisations and other gardeners
- they do not discriminate against one another due to diversity in age, cultural background, ability, gender, sexuality
- they communicate with council and/or other landowners and stakeholders in an appropriate manner

- decision making is democratic, transparent and inclusive
- any water leaving the garden is not contaminated by sediment, fertiliser, manure or excessive organic matter that might pollute waterways
- noise levels within the garden are maintained at a level that does not disturb neighbours
- sustainable practices are employed including the avoidance of chemicals such as herbicides, fungicides and pesticides (e.g. round up)
- manures, compost systems and organics fertiliser odours are controlled appropriately
- compost and worm farming systems are maintained so as not to attract vermin
- excess materials including soil, pavers, wood, etc are stored appropriately within leased boundary and pose no risk to users or surrounding residents
- rainwater harvesting systems are maintained to ensure water is of a high quality
- lawn areas are regularly mowed and garden beds kept tidy. Any materials delivered to or stored at the garden are maintained so as not to create an environment which reduces the amenity of the area for other residents in the community, and
- visitors are welcomed to the garden, and members of the public can access the community garden during daylight hours.

Roles of Community Gardeners

Community gardeners:

- are encouraged to develop their own internal policies, organisational procedures and plan of management providing they liaise with and get support and approval from the landowner and/or trustee
- should be consulted with regard to any decision that may affect their garden and be advised by council in a timely manner of any changes to any guidelines that impact them, and

- should be treated with respect by other gardeners, local residents and partnering organisations.

Conflict Resolution and Complaints

Community Gardens should aim to promote an environment that is tolerant and caring. However if conflicts arise, either within the garden group or with external stakeholders such as local residents or council, council recommends that steps be taken immediately to accelerate its resolution, including communicating respectfully with those involved; and engaging the assistance of a mediator where appropriate.

It is expected that most conflicts can be resolved internally, however, if a mediator is required, there are officers within council that are trained and capable of facilitating a resolution.

Insurance and Risk Management

It is essential garden groups be aware of the risks associated with undertaking a publicly accessible community garden project. Each garden group has a duty of care to any person who has access to the garden. To ensure the appropriate level of duty of care, a minimum of \$20,000,000 of public liability insurance policy is required to be held.

Council recognises public liability insurance has an associated cost, and may not be easily accessible to small community groups. Options for obtaining insurance cover include:

- the group can become an incorporated association through the Queensland Office of Fair Trading and manage their own insurance
- the group may be auspiced by another organisation or agency, such as a neighbourhood centre, and as a project of that organisation will be covered by their insurance, and
- a group of community gardens with similar objectives might obtain insurance together.

Incorporation

Council encourages community garden groups to have a clear and identified legal structure. Garden groups can apply to the Queensland Office of Fair Trading to become Incorporated Associations. This arrangement affords the group some flexibility in the management of funds and enables them to open a bank account, obtain public liability insurance cover and apply for government grants. Incorporation as an association requires groups to establish a management committee with annually elected office bearers and to commit to regular meetings. This can be beneficial for the project as it maintains a structure that can address management issues as they arise.

Establishment of New Community Gardens on Council Land

Council encourages resident groups to work in partnership with relevant council staff in the establishment of new community gardens. Establishing a community garden can be a complex process requiring consultation with a broad range of stakeholders and there are a number of issues that need to be considered before a community garden is initiated.

To assist this process council has developed a “Community Gardens Enquiry Management Framework” which is outlined within council’s *Community Garden’s Policy*. Following on from this, these guidelines outline the proposed “Procedure for Starting a New Community Garden” on council owned or managed land. This procedure will help community garden groups understand council’s process for handling enquiries relating to the potential development of community garden.

To support community garden groups sourcing appropriate sites for the potential development of a community garden, council has also developed an initial site selection criterion. It is recommended that community garden groups review this criterion which is outlined within council’s *Community Gardens Policy*. This will ensure the community garden group is aware of initial site selection considerations and may

help to narrow their search for an appropriate site.

Note: Council's Parks and Gardens Staff can assist with these initial processes.

Tenure Arrangements

New groups wishing to establish community gardens on council owned or managed land may be offered an initial trial period tenure arrangement of one year. If the garden group fulfils all its responsibilities with regard to the management of the garden, a longer arrangement may be negotiated.

Groups should be aware that the state charges a fee for tenure arrangements on state land managed by council. Community groups should also be aware that some tenure arrangements on state land prohibit permanent new structures to be developed on the land.

Tenure arrangements with groups could be revoked or not renewed if:

- The group disbands or ceases to function.
- The garden is not maintained or becomes unsafe for public access.
- Appropriate insurance cover is not maintained.

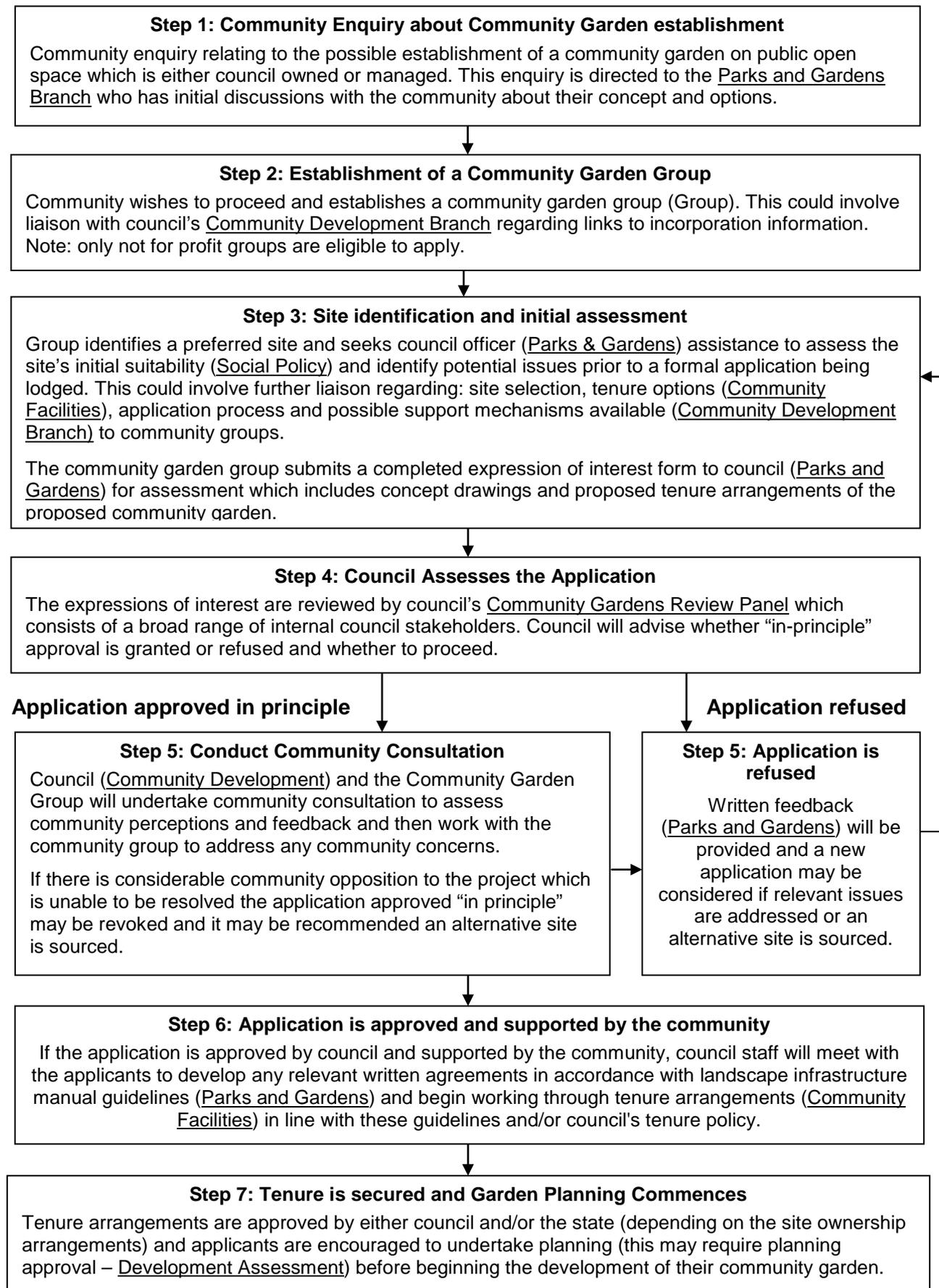
Open Space Management

Council considers community gardens to be a valid and important land use within the region's open space network. Where appropriate, community gardens may be incorporated into plans of management for public open space.

Upgrades to parks, open spaces or community facilities may also provide an opportunity for council to consult with the community and see if there is enough interest and capacity to develop community gardens as part of a proposed upgrade or to include a community garden in a new development. Existing community facilities can be ideal sites for community gardens because they normally already have infrastructure such as toilets, shelter and storage areas.

Procedure for Starting a New Community Garden

Note: Refer to Council's *Community Gardens Policy* for council officer roles and responsibilities



Measurement of Success

These guidelines will be reviewed in conjunction with council's *Community Gardens Policy* in August 2012, to evaluate:

- the guidelines progression in achieving policy outcomes
- financial impact on council including maintenance and administrative costs for council owned or managed land used for community gardens
- level of compliance with community gardens guidelines by garden groups
- contribution made by community gardens in achieving the aims of other council policies and strategies, and
- satisfaction levels of all stakeholders (internal and external).

Definitions

Compliant: compatible with, or following, guidelines, specifications, rules, or laws.

Council: Sunshine Coast Regional Council.

Council owned or controlled land: land under public ownership and designated for use by the community for social and cultural activities, sport, informal recreation and leisure use, and for conservation purposes.

Council owned or controlled land includes:

- a. council owned land – freehold
- b. council land where council is nominated as trustee under the *Land Act 1994* and *Local Government Act 2009*, and
- c. Crown Land where council is nominated as trustee.

Tenure: a lease, licence, lessee permit, permit to occupy or such other similar tenure as is appropriate to land use and allocation.

Related Policies and Legislation

When applying these guidelines, all relevant Sunshine Coast Regional Council and state legislation must be taken into consideration. Council's *Community Gardens Policy* outlines all associated local and state strategies, policies, laws and legislation.

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