



CITY OF VANCOUVER

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: April 24, 2006
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Meeting Date: May 16, 2006

TO: Vancouver City Council

FROM: Director of Social Planning and General Manager of Engineering Services

SUBJECT: Community Garden Pilot Project

RECOMMENDATION

- A. THAT Council allocate the Community Amenity Contribution of \$22,475 from the re-development of 1875 West 75th Avenue to a Greenways Project account to be used for the development of Community Gardens at three (3) specific sites as identified in the report. (Source of the funding is allocation of funds approved for this purpose by Council on September 15, 2005.)
- B. THAT Council approve a community garden pilot project and *Draft Community Garden Operational Guidelines for Land other than City Parks* as described in Appendix A.
- C. THAT the General Manager of Engineering Services, in consultation with the Director of Social Planning, be given standing authority to enter into community garden user agreements with the non-profit organizations selected to be part of the pilot project.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager supports RECOMMENDATIONS A, B & C

COUNCIL POLICY

Sustainability Policy

In April 2002, the City adopted a formal position, definition and principles on sustainability which in part, states that "Sustainability requires integrated decision making that takes into

account economic, ecological, and social impacts as a whole." On May 24, 2005, Council further approved a definition of Social Sustainability to be used for developing the social component of the City's sustainability objectives.

Food Policy

On July 8, 2003, Council approved a motion supporting the development of a just and sustainable food system for the City of Vancouver that fosters equitable food production, distribution, consumption, nutrition, community development, and environmental health.

On December 11, 2003, Council approved a Food Action Plan (www.vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/cclerk/20031209/221.htm) consisting of five (5) specific action items to be developed by the Vancouver Food Policy Council and staff. One of the five action items called for the creation of more community gardens on currently unused City land, other than park land.

SUMMARY

In September 2005, City Council approved the allocation of a Community Amenity Contribution (CAC) of \$22,475 to be used for urban agriculture across the city. Urban agriculture is an umbrella term that refers to activities involving the production, processing or marketing of food on land and water in urban and peri-urban areas. In Vancouver, this includes community and private gardens, edible landscaping, fruit trees, roof top gardens, farmers markets, hobby beekeeping, and composting.

The City owns a number of currently unoccupied properties that have great potential for urban agricultural activities such as community gardens. Community gardening and other forms of urban agriculture provide a number of positive social, educational and environmental impacts in neighbourhoods. Staff recommend using the CAC designated for urban agriculture to develop a community garden pilot project managed under operational guidelines outlined in Appendix A.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to seek Council's approval to:

- Commence a community garden pilot project managed under the *Draft Community Garden Operational Guidelines for Land other than City Parks* (Appendix A),
- Allocate a Community Amenity Contribution of \$22,475 to a Greenways Project account to develop urban agriculture at 3 specific sites chosen for the pilot project and,
- Grant standing authority to the General Manager of Engineering Services, in consultation with the Director of Social Planning, to enter into community garden user agreements with the non-profit organizations selected to be part of the pilot project.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

On September 15, 2005 Council approved a motion supporting an exception to the rezoning and removal of 1875 West 75th Avenue from the Agricultural Land Reserve in exchange for

100% of the Community Amenity Contribution (\$22,475) being utilized for urban agriculture amenities across the City.

The City of Vancouver owns properties slated for future development or identified as street and transportation rights-of-way. These properties sit vacant in a variety of locations and settings; from busy corner lots to vibrant neighbourhoods. Often these unused properties attract refuse or low level criminal activity. Using these properties for urban agricultural purposes until further development, offers residents or local community agencies community and/or capacity building opportunities.

By increasing the number of urban agricultural opportunities on currently unused City land, the City can benefit from a number of cost savings. Potential savings include reduced storm-water management costs, reduced waste removal fees (by using composted organic waste and reducing illegal dumping), and reductions in emissions and transportation costs (food travels shorter distances to consumers, consumers travel shorter distances to grow or purchase it).

Over the past decade the Vancouver School Board and the Vancouver Park Board have both played important roles in developing and maintaining food-related initiatives at the local level. The Vancouver School Board delivers school breakfast and lunch programs and has many school gardens on their properties. The Vancouver Park Board has played a key role in community garden development and has eleven community gardens in parks.

While the Vancouver Park Board has its own policy regarding the operation of community gardens on their properties, there are currently no city-wide guidelines to direct the operation of gardens on sites other than park land. Engineering Services gives permits to four established community gardens on Engineering property and to 42 individuals with allotment plots on the East Boulevard street right-of-way. These gardens operate under permit conditions created for each particular situation rather than a universal set of operational guidelines. Agreements also exist with community garden groups near the Joyce Street and Broadway SkyTrain stations through leases with Translink, and at Mole Hill through the Housing Centre.

1. Benefits of Community Gardens

Community gardening and other forms of urban agriculture provide positive social, educational and environmental impacts in neighbourhoods. These include community bonding, community revitalization, an enriched sense of identity and belonging through increased social interaction, intergenerational interaction, opportunities for youth engagement, employment training and job creation, crime prevention, creation of biodiversity, providing an inexpensive way for people with low incomes to grow food, and decreasing some of the energy consumed and pollution produced in providing food to city residents.

With today's food travelling an average of 2,400 kilometers from farms to our kitchens, community gardens decrease the production of greenhouse gases by keeping food growth closer to home.

Most places, including Vancouver, include citizens who lack access to sufficient food, leaving many to rely on emergency food supplies. While emergency food services are available in Vancouver, the key to food security is to move away from a food system that requires such

services. Rather than providing food through emergency or charitable means, which often leads to inadequate nutrition, community gardens and urban agriculture are central to an approach that increases individual and community self-sufficiency and allows for accessing food with dignity.

The presence of community gardens discourages criminal behaviour and vandalism. A green and groomed community garden shows that residents care about the property and each other.

2. Current Situation in Vancouver

Since the Park Board approved a community garden policy in 1995, additional community gardens have been established or expanded. Even with the notable successes of the existing policy, it is clear that there is a great untapped opportunity to further develop community gardens and other forms of urban agriculture in Vancouver.

A number of Canadian cities make far better use of their opportunities for urban agriculture. For example, a recent study indicates that the City of Montreal has 75 operating community garden sites, containing 6,654 allotment plots, which are gardened by approximately 10,000 residents (1.5% of the city's adult population). Furthermore, the City of Montreal has created an official zoning designation for 13 garden sites protecting them in perpetuity.

Vancouver has 18 operating community garden sites, containing 950 allotment plots, which are gardened by approximately 1500 residents (0.4% of the city's population) and can be found on park, school, city and transit owned land. The current availability of community gardens in Vancouver is inadequate to keep up with the demand for them. While some community gardens in the city are able to accommodate new gardeners, wait-lists average at over twenty people per garden. Prospective community gardeners in Vancouver often wait up to a year or longer to receive a garden plot. Five out of six neighbourhoods that have completed the CityPlan Community Visioning Program have suggested that the greening of parks, streets, and public spaces could be augmented through the creation of community gardens.

Population growth in Vancouver - currently averaging 6,000 people in the city every year - is accommodated in new housing created largely through redevelopment and infill. As densification proceeds, an increasing number of people may not have access to their own yards nor have a place to garden or grow food.

These statistics, and demand for easily accessible green space and community gardens will increase while available land decreases.

3. Proposed Community Garden Pilot Project

The Park Board Community Gardens Policy has been very successful in guiding community garden development on park land. However, competing activities and the challenge of providing park space for all users, limits the scope of community gardens in parks. While the Park Board Community Gardens Policy helped inform the proposed operational guidelines (Appendix A), Vancouver's Food Policy mandate and Food Action Plan call for several additional factors to be considered; factors that include identifying a community garden as a piece of public land used by a non-profit society to grow food products for their members' benefit through cooking programs or economic development opportunities. Input was also acquired from a variety of other community sources.

In order to assess the successes and challenges of working within the operational guidelines, and to determine the value of creating a community garden policy that will encompass those existing gardens currently operating under other agreements (excluding parks), it is proposed that a community garden pilot project be established. This will allow Engineering (Greenways) and Social Planning (Food Policy) staff to review land inventory, site requirements, appropriate user groups, start-up requirements and costs, community consultation strategies and staffing. The pilot project will be managed within current staffing levels.

Costs associated with starting a community garden pilot project are: preparing the land by removing unwanted vegetation and debris, adding compost, and providing a water connection. These costs range from \$6000 to \$8000 per garden depending on the size of the property and the complexity of bringing water to the site. Resources are also needed to mentor individuals with no knowledge of gardening or setting up community gardens. Building raised beds, fencing, pathways and other community garden infrastructure would be the responsibility of the non-profit groups chosen to manage the community gardens. By allocating the Community Amenity Contribution of \$22,475 to a Capital account, funding will be in place to develop 3 new community gardens, contribute to the necessary skill building of groups of individuals, and support associated urban agriculture activities.

The following City-owned lots have been identified as pilot project community garden development sites. All costs are approximate and will remain within the overall budget:

- (a) Clark Drive and Broadway (1290 E Broadway) - this 11m x 37m lot on the southwest corner is an Engineering Capital asset purchased for road in 1995. It was identified in the Clark/Knight Corridor Plan (March 2005) as the location for a temporary green space with benches, pathways and landscaping in order to clean up the site until the City is able to integrate this parcel as part of future redevelopment. A community garden plan would incorporate these previously approved elements. Community use would be temporary with terms to be specified in a user agreement. Projected start-up costs are \$6000 which include:
 - (i) Clearing the land - approx \$1000,
 - (ii) Providing a water connection - approx \$5000,
 - (iii) Providing compost -Landfill donation
- (b) West 6th Ave, north side, from Burrard St to east of Pine St - Similar to the existing Cypress and Maple Community Gardens west of Burrard St, this garden would encompass the north boulevard of the 1600 and 1700 blocks of West 6th Ave. A water connection for both blocks would be provided by the same works crew, saving some installation costs. East of Pine St the land has already been cleared and would not require further work. Estimated cost is \$10,000 which includes:
 - (i) Clearing the land - approx \$2000
 - (ii) Providing a water connection to each block - approx \$8,000
 - (iii) Providing compost - Landfill donation
- (c) East Boulevard, west side from 57th Ave to 64 m north - The Arbutus Victory Garden on East Boulevard at 50th, next to the railway tracks, started during WWII and over the years, has expanded to include dozens of allotment plots between 50th and 57th Avenues. The section north of 57th is one of the few remaining on the East Boulevard street right-of-way that is not occupied by existing allotment plots. The property is directly across from the St Faith's

Church rectory. A 1985 City Council approved condition of gardening on East Boulevard is that the gardener must have the written permission of the resident across the street. The church minister has given permission in the past, but the compacted soil and lack of water access has discouraged gardeners from continuing. The area could be divided into garden plots for approximately 12 new gardeners. Estimated start-up costs for this 64m x 5m property are \$6000, including:

- (i) Clearing the land - approx \$1000
- (ii) Providing a water connection - approximately \$5000
- (iii) Providing compost - Landfill donation

A decision regarding the governance of these sites as community gardens will be made based on public consultation and further analysis of appropriate criteria.

Similar to Park Board's Community Gardens Policy, the *Draft Community Garden Operational Guidelines for Land other than City Parks* (Appendix A), defines a community garden as a community development initiative operated by a non-profit society. The guidelines propose that the City enter into a user agreement with each non-profit organization, outlining their management responsibilities and terms of use. It is therefore suggested that Council grant standing authority for Engineering staff (since all three identified sites are associated with Engineering) in consultation with Social Planning, to enter into user agreements with the non-profit organizations selected to manage the pilot project community gardens.

Results of the community garden pilot project and the *Draft Community Garden Operational Guidelines for Land other than City Parks* will be reported back to Council after the new community gardens have been in operation for one full growing season.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial implications are limited to the transfer of the Community Amenity Contribution of \$22,475 into a Greenways Project account for urban agriculture amenities, including a community garden pilot project. The non-profit organizations chosen to operate the pilot community gardens will assume all maintenance responsibilities and associated operating costs. There are no financial implications from a staff perspective as the pilot project will be managed within current staffing levels. Future community garden development and staffing requirements will be assessed with a report back after the first full growing season.

CONCLUSION

Staff recommend the approval of a community garden pilot project managed under the *Draft Community Garden Operational Guidelines for Land other than City Parks* (Appendix A) to be developed and implemented with the allocation of a Community Amenity Contribution of \$22,475 at the three (3) specific sites identified in the report.

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APPENDIX A

Draft Community Garden Operational Guidelines for Land Other Than City Parks

Definition:

The City of Vancouver recognizes community gardening as a valuable recreational activity that can contribute to community development, environmental awareness, positive social interaction and community education. The City recognizes that community garden development is a community driven process and will collaborate with interested groups in assisting the development of new community gardens.

For the purposes of these guidelines, a community garden is defined as a place where people grow and maintain plants on City-owned property as a community development and environmental enrichment initiative operated by a non-profit society. Residential boulevard gardens, Green Streets Program gardens and beautification projects are not included in this definition of community gardens.

Community gardens may exist in any area of the city and may be:

- A piece of public land used by a non-profit society to produce edible and ornamental plants for the personal use of society members and/or;
- A piece of public land used by a non-profit society to grow food products for their members' benefit through cooking programs or City approved economic development training opportunities;

featuring one or more of the following:

- A community development program which encourages the involvement of local schools, youth groups, senior citizens and others who do not have an assigned plot in gardening activities;
- An environmental enrichment program which offers demonstration activities to encourage urban agriculture outside of community gardens;
- Promotes an increase in environmental biodiversity and understanding of local food production;
- Contributes to growing food for charitable purposes;
- Represents the diversity of the community in which the community garden is located.

1. Clause One:

The City will support the development of community gardens in Vancouver by:

- (a) Providing access to information on the development and operation of community gardens;
- (b) Assisting interested groups in searching for suitable land for the development of community gardens;
- (c) Assisting with the development of a city-wide umbrella organization to support the creation of new gardens and provide support and networking opportunities for existing community gardens.

2. Clause Two:

Once a suitable City-owned site has been located for a community garden, the following conditions will apply:

- (a) The garden is developed and maintained at no cost to the City, except that prior to the first season, the City will, at its cost, prepare the site for planting

- by removing undesirable vegetation, adding compost and bringing water to the site;
- (b) A community consultation process, jointly undertaken by the non-profit society and the City, indicates neighbourhood support for the garden;
 - (c) A garden site plan must be approved by City staff. The plan must include the layout of the plots and indicate any proposed structures or fences;
 - (d) A non-profit society (the "Society") agrees to develop and operate the garden according to a user's agreement which will specify the terms of use, management responsibilities and access procedures including the following specific terms:
 - (i) The standard term of the user agreement will be 5 years unless the specific terms of use dictate otherwise or the Society has failed to demonstrate the ability to manage and maintain the garden;
 - (ii) Longer terms are warranted in circumstances deemed relevant or where the Society can demonstrate that the standard five year term would significantly restrict the Society's ability to:
 - (1) Comply with City policies and direction;
 - (2) Conduct community outreach programming beyond the Society's members;
 - (3) Implement a long term plan;
 - (4) Execute significant approved site improvements.
 - (iii) Allotments of space must be made from a waiting list on a first come, first served basis with preference to those with no garden plots elsewhere;
 - (iv) Membership in the garden's Society and the opportunity to be allotted a plot must be open to any resident of Vancouver with preference given to residents of the neighbourhood in which the garden is located;
 - (v) Organic gardening and integrated pest management practices are to be followed. No synthetic pesticides or fertilizers are to be used;
 - (vi) Allotment fees charged by the society must be reported to the City;
 - (vii) The Society must adhere to maintenance standards set by the City;
 - (viii) No locked barriers to general public access to the site can be erected;
 - (ix) Garden practices shall comply with all City policies and by-laws.

Although located on public property with the prior approval of the City, community gardens are operated by volunteers from the community.