

Community Consultation for Best Community Uses Of Temporary Gardens on Private Vacant Lands



Prepared by the **Shifting Growth Garden Society**

www.shiftinggrowth.com

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Preface

This Community Consultation for Best Community Uses of Temporary Gardens on Private Vacant Lands best practises paper is designed to assist community groups who would like to start a community garden on a private property. This paper was designed to communicate the process which demonstrates how proper community consultation enhances the long-term value for a development project and property values. This paper focuses on community gardener organizations that are in the process of acquiring private vacant properties in order to create a temporary community garden. This paper outlines the process which is required to acquire land, consult with the community, educate and create additional benefits for local community members, and relocate the garden to an alternative site.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: SHIFTING GROWTH GARDEN SOCIETY

Shifting Growth is a register charity (#80111 9314 RR0001) with a mission to transform vacant, under-utilized spaces into temporary community gardens and growing spaces. A Vancouver-based organization coordinating and managing community garden projects.

Shifting Growth's objectives are:

- To utilize underdeveloped/vacant land as growing spaces.
- To foster community engagement through accessible green spaces.
- To increase awareness about the growing environment.



The Shifting Growth approach allows land to be utilized as a temporary growing space for the community. Our gardens and garden infrastructure are completely mobile and can be relocated to a nearby site (or park space) once the space is ready for alternative purposes (development, sale, remediation...). Our goal is to simply utilize vacant space to allow community members to grow food and participate in gardening. Every growing space gained creates more community connections and gets people growing!

Learn more: www.shiftinggrowth.com

ABOUT THE REAL ESTATE FOUNDATION OF BC

The Real Estate Foundation of BC's mission is to transform land use attitudes and practices through innovation, stewardship, and learning. As a pivotal connector on land use and real estate issues, the Real Estate Foundation provides funding and information to non-profit organizations working to enable positive change in BC communities. By supporting progressive solutions, the Foundation's work contributes to resilient, healthy communities and natural environments.



Learn more: www.refbc.com

Land Acquisition

Acquiring private land to establish a community garden creates unique challenges regarding stakeholder management, communications and infrastructure. The organization must work with both the landowner and community members to allow the project to develop. Many vacant properties lay idle due to three main factors:

- 1) Market conditions – waiting to markets/value to improve
- 2) Contamination – contaminated sites require a Certificate of Compliance to develop. The process of remediation is costly and could not be feasibly due to the high cost of remediation as compared with the value of the land. Passive remediation (vacant) is the lowest risk with the least cost option for landowners holding former service stations.
- 3) Zoning/Bylaws – Many sites have restrictions regarding allowable uses. Many sites lay vacant while the development plans and zoning permits are being developed.



LANDOWNER CONCERNS

Landowners concerns stem from a lack of knowledge (specifically regarding the tax adjustments, city support and the communities interest in gardening) and a concern regarding permanence. When acquiring a private property for the purpose of developing a community garden, three key areas of interest are always raised from the landowner:

1) Agreements

Numerous examples of land-use agreements for community garden can be sourced online. The key features of the agreements state that the organization has the right to use the land for the purpose of a community garden. These agreements are similar to a lease. In addition to a land-use agreement,

numerous additional agreements could be required (Service Agreement, Maps, Scope of Services....). Ensure all potential issues are disclosed and agreed to in regards to maintenance of site, tax changes, utilities... A termination clause must be written into all agreements, allowing the landowner to discontinue the project at their will. An indemnification clause should be written in as well, removing all potential for liability and litigation against the landowner from the organization's project or actions.

2) Community Entrenchment

A concern for all landowners is to create a project which has large community support and restricts their future land-use options. No landowner would like to be viewed as the party which demolished a community garden. The first essential component to reducing community entrenchment is through mobile garden infrastructure.



With all garden beds, sheds, benches mobile and impermanent, the site can be relocated, as opposed to demolished. A communications strategy is required to clearly communicate the goals and timeframe of the garden. Many gardeners are happy to grow for just 1 year at a time. Titling the garden as 'Temporary' assists in stimulating the conversation early on in the project and community involvement. Finally, clear language in a Gardener Agreement which states the project is temporary and the garden beds may be relocated is an additional step to clearly communicate the restrictions of developing community gardens on private land.

3) Permanence

Related to community entrenchment, a key issue revolves around how long the project is in place and how it will impact future development plans. Landowners are concerned a different land-use could take precedence over their future plans. Land-use agreement could range from 1 year to 5 years. On average, landowners are willing to sign a 3 year term. Removal clauses must be included, as this



allows a no-risk option for the landowner if they decide to conclude the project.

SOLUTION - KEY TACTICS TO LANDOWNER CONCERNS

- 1) Have agreements in place for landowner to sign – include a 30 day removal clause (the same as the numerous municipalities’ community gardens on public land).
- 2) Have insurance in place for activity.
- 3) Use mobile infrastructure.
- 4) Develop a communications strategy - communicate the temporary nature of garden.
- 5) Have knowledge of tax changes, land-use changes, zoning regulations for specific property.

Community Consultation Process

The community consultation allows for an opportunity for community members to gather together to share thoughts and ideas about the proposed garden. This is the first opportunity to meet the gardeners and to share the goals and expectations of the garden. From the experience of Shifting Growth’s past consultations, it is best to allow interested gardeners to fill out a survey to get some general feedback before a meeting.

A consultation work plan should be developed before any communications regarding the project begins.

See attached Garden Work Plan for the stages of work required, detailed below.

SIGNAGE

Ideally, this is the first piece of garden infrastructure to be placed on site. The sign should be a simple design with a name for the garden, the website and an email address. This provides anyone walking in the area to become aware of the potential project early on in the process



WEBSITE

The creation of a website allows for interested community members to have a platform to communicate with the garden managers or landowners regarding any issues/thoughts on the garden. An email address and direct contact information is an excellent method to increase community communication.

A website should go live during the first step, inviting interested gardeners to complete a survey about their gardening experience, aspirations for the new garden in their community, and how they would like to be involved. This tells the garden organizers what skills, experiences, and hopes gardeners have for their new space. This is also the opportunity to complete the online registration to reserve your spot in the garden.

ONLINE SURVEY

The online survey allows all interested gardeners to have an opportunity to share their thoughts and goals for the garden. As well, data about who the gardeners are, where they live and what they would like to see in the garden is collected. This online step allows the garden organizers to begin adjust the design, educational features, accessibility, workshops and goals for the garden. This information can then be communicated before a meeting. Scheduling a consultation where all members can be present is challenging, whereby an online forum can be completed by most gardeners.



See attached Online Survey Sample for questions that could be included in a gardener survey.

NEWSLETTER

A newsletter provides an opportunity for the garden developers to determine the level of interest in a community garden. Ideally, the newsletter will introduce the potential for a community garden and

provide information on a consultation meeting. It is best to not introduce specifics to the proposed garden, as many could believe the garden is a done-deal and some may get distracted with small features (eg. Site layout...). These features are best to be discussed at a community consultation meeting.

HANDOUTS

The handouts are a physical letter which could be delivered by Shifting Growth or our garden managers/coordinators. This would have similar language to the newsletter, simply outlining the garden project and detailing the date for the consultation.

COMMUNITY MEETING

Before the garden is built, the garden organizers convene a community conversation for registered and interested members to gather in a nearby neighbourhood space. This is an opportunity for gardeners to meet one another, the team, and plan for the upcoming growing season.



Ideally this is promoted through newsletters and handouts. The meeting will review who the garden partners are, the general design and how the garden will run. Ideally, the consultation team comes to the meeting with a predetermined timelines, design and management structure – with flexibility to allow for changes which are requested from the community. This would also be the first opportunity for community members to sign up to a plot and commit to a plot.

Material required for a community consultation meeting:

- Flyers/Cards
- E-Mail Sign-Up List
- Flyers with Community Meeting Information
- Sample garden design
- Project Signage
- Pens, Post-Its, Tape, Blank Paper, White Board Markers
- Display Garden Box
- Drinks/Snacks



A sample Community Consultation meeting agenda:

- 1) Elect a minute taker
- 2) Introductions
- 3) Names, why do you want to join a community garden?
- 4) Presentation of Garden Organizers
- 5) Presentation of work already done for garden (design, signage...)
- 6) Division in groups of 3, discussion about one question:
 - How do we all make the garden space inclusive and welcoming?
 - How do we raise money to build the garden?
 - How do we make sure the garden becomes part of the neighborhood life?
- 7) Presentation of your discussion to the rest of the group
- 8) Activities for the garden
- 9) Create/review timelines
- 10) Establish committees
- 11) Next steps and communications



DESIGN

The garden design should be a simple design, allowing for garden expansion as requested by the community.

The garden design should incorporate essential elements which are common in all community gardens;

- Community gardener beds
- Communal beds – product donated to food banks
- Flower beds
- Water hookup – simple spigot
- Communal area with benches, acts as demonstration area
- Community board – usually on wall of shed.
- Compost area in raised beds
- Small shed for tools
- Fencing (could be incorporated with flower beds buffer)
- Fruit Tree in raised planter box
- Groundcover



Allowing the community to have input for the design should be encouraged. This data should be collected via online survey and during a consultation meeting. Having the community engaged through the design process allows the community to have input on the physical space.

Continued Garden Success & Learning

Creating a community garden on a vacant property brings direct benefits to garden members, local community members and surrounding businesses. To create an inclusive, successful garden, the community must stay invested in the garden. As well, additional benefits can arise from a high-profile space being utilized as a community garden.

GARDEN ROLES

To continue the success of the gardens, organizational committees formed from garden members should be created to allow gardeners an opportunity to get involved and to assist the garden organizers with management of the space. Garden roles can be assembled as follows:

- 1) Organizational Committee
 - Manages waitlist, agreements, plot allocations, communications.
- 2) Maintenance Committee
 - Ensure the site is tidy and visually appealing.
- 3) Educational Committee
 - Assist gardeners with questions and tips about growing food.
- 4) Events Committee
 - Organizes garden meetings, parties, potlucks, workshops.

EDUCATION

Along with workshops within the garden, passive educational displays could be created to educate community members throughout the garden life-time. Using on-site educational installations creates a more welcoming garden and draws passer-byers into the garden to learn more. Demonstrations and installations allow community members to interact with communal garden features.

The goals of the educational programs should be to educate the community about urban agriculture and growing techniques – to maximize the growing time and increase community benefits while the land is utilized as a temporary community garden.

Listed below are some examples of educational displays and installations which could be incorporated into any temporary community garden. Signage can be printed from www.shiftinggrowth.com

DEMO PLOTS



Throughout the growing season, demonstration garden & food-growing plots are created with clear signage – allowing any community member to read, touch and see many varieties of vegetables which can be growing locally at any garden in the city.

CHICKEN COOP



A demo chicken coop allows community members to interact with small, urban chicken coops which have been gaining in popularity. Check with local by-law regarding on-site animals.

The purpose is to simply introduce local communities to this urban agriculture infrastructure and to educate through the signage.

COMPOSTING



Learn about how to compost in the garden and how the composting cycle works to create high-quality soil through our garden compost installations. Educating community garden members on how to properly manage garden by-products is an essential component to garden success.

COMMUNITY & BULLETIN BOARD



Combining a shed, tool storage with a community board creates a focal point for each garden. The community board acts as a place for information and education on garden tips, upcoming events and contact information. Half the board allows for community members to place their own information (eg. local events, relevant businesses....).

WATER CONSERVATION



Water conservation is an essential component to a sustainable garden. By incorporating educational demonstrations and learning opportunities, community members have an opportunity to learn more about the City's initiatives to encourage water collection and conservation.

POLLINATOR BEES



Pollination bees are one of the most important ecosystem service and network on the planet. Incorporating bee habitat and flowers for pollination into our community gardens encourages a healthy ecosystem and provides the proper elements to a successful growing space.

FRUIT TREES



Each garden should have a native fruit tree to provide a focal point to the garden, allow an opportunity to involve local fruit tree groups. Fruit trees provide an opportunity for community members to learn more about incorporating native fruit trees into local properties and to learn more about how fruit trees grow.

ASK AN URBAN FARMER SERIES



The 'Ask An Urban Farmer' program is an educational opportunity for community gardeners to consult and learn from urban farmers. The program is facilitated by local urban farmers, allowing for a unique opportunity to bridge the knowledge gap between urban farmers and gardeners. The program provides an opportunity for gardeners to ask questions, get tips and learn more about urban food growing. In addition to the in-garden consultations and meetings, the urban farmer will assess and diagnose each garden bed in a community garden – allowing feedback and involvement for all the gardeners of the participating community garden.

Garden Relocation

Every garden on private land will, at some time, be replaced with another land-use. The gardens are temporary and the garden conclusion and relocation must be communicated and planned to ensure community members feel comfortable with the process and the landowner does not get vilified. Ongoing communications with the landowner about



timelines and expected termination of the agreement is vital to the success of the project and future similar projects. Ideally the terms of the agreements conclude at the end of the growing season. With few gardeners growing year-round, the time to remove a garden would be from October to February. The two key stakeholders who must be consulted during this process are the garden members and landowners, with each requiring a unique approach.

LANDOWNER

Communicating the future land-use of the site is a valuable means to showcase the temporary nature of the project, while creating an opportunity for the landowner to begin their community consultation process required for development. Signage should be erected onsite to communicate the all community members regarding the future land-use. Working with the landowner to communicate the future land-use and communicating with garden members and community members about the future land-use is vital to ensure similar projects can be created in other areas. The goal is to provide benefits to the landowner, to showcase temporary gardens as a valuable interim land-use for private property holders.

GARDEN MEMBERS

Each gardener should have been aware of the terms of the agreements and have signed a Gardener Agreement acknowledging that the garden will not be a permanent structure. Communications should begin as soon as the landowner communicates the future land-use. The overall goal is to relocate the garden to a local site. Utilizing mobile garden infrastructure allows for a simple relocation of the entire garden, assuming an alternative site is prepared. Discussions with City departments to potentially identify a location for the garden within a park should begin as soon as the landowner has notified the garden organizers regarding the future land-use. As well, working closely with City departments to find placements within City gardens should also be investigated.



Summary

Developing temporary, community based projects on private land creates unique challenges for all stakeholders involved. Few examples of similar projects exist in the public realm to learn and share experiences. The goal of this paper was to briefly summarize the key elements related to landowner acceptance and community support. Through the use of risk mitigation techniques (communications, mobile infrastructure and consistent project management), landowners will become more accepting of considering utilizing private property for community uses. Involving the community while ensuring the feelings of ownership is reduced is a challenge. Thorough communications regarding the timelines, goals and agreements create an open and transparent to the entire process. As well, simply approaching any project on a year-by-year basis is beneficial to ensuring no long term goals are set by the community.

The goal of a temporary community gardens should be to maximize community benefits and grow food. By utilizing a space not intended for a community use, any improvement to the neighbourhood is greatly welcomed. Creating additional benefits within the space through education and workshops increases local food knowledge and allows community members who may not be a member of the garden to become involved within the garden. Education and clear communication between community members and garden members create inclusive, open gardens. Utilizing any private space for a community project should involve the goal of inclusivity and connectivity. By creating partnership with all local neighbouring organizations brings more people into the space to enjoy.

It is recommended that if any organization is preparing to develop a temporary community project on a private property, the steps outlined in this paper should be followed. Without a clear project plan and required knowledge regarding the basic issues regarding land-use and management, acquiring private land could be challenging.

To learn more about Shifting Growth and how to acquire private land for the purpose of creating temporary community gardens and projects, contact us through www.shiftinggrowth.com