

**COMMUNITY GARDENS AS AN
URBAN PLANNING ISSUE**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis develops the argument that community gardens have many social benefits making them a worthwhile urban amenity. The thesis question is: **how can community gardens be implemented to maximize social benefits while overcoming obstacles and minimizing conflicts?**

The literature review describes how community allotment gardens developed and evolved, in a North American and European context. Community gardens are then discussed from a planning perspective. For this purpose, planning literature about sustainable communities is examined for its relevance to community gardens.

The information collected directs the inquiry into a case study: The Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Garden. Through interviews with local activists and an analysis of relevant articles, this case study examines the benefits of this community garden and the obstacles that were faced in the process of implementing it. Lessons from this case study are then applied to the planning of a community garden in the Burnaby Heights Area. For this purpose, a committee was formed. The information provided by this committee was collected in a focus group format. In addition, this section chronicles the correspondence with different municipal departments.

The general purpose of this study is to demonstrate the validity of the provision for community gardens in urban planning. The process of implementing a community garden will demonstrate the problems facing local activists, and illuminate why the role of planners is so crucial.

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PREFACE

In my North Burnaby neighbourhood, I am blessed with an abundance of green space, and an urban trail system connecting me ultimately to UBC, should I wish to ride my bike there. But also, on this green space, there are several fruit trees - remnants from former residential sites that have been allowed to remain. I make it my fall ritual to collect their fruits. These excursions provide me and other residents an enormous sense of satisfaction.

Not only do we enjoy the peaceful excursions of walking in the neighbourhood, but we also benefit from the productive activity. In addition, there are many wildlife species in the area. I have seen deer, raccoons, coyotes, raptors, and frogs.

This green space is minimally maintained (mowed twice yearly by civic authorities) and expansive. I had thought for many years, "why can't more fruit trees be planted in the area so that more people could enjoy their benefits?".

My orientation week at the School of Community and Regional Planning included a walking tour of the Strathcona Gardens. With its wild habitat, frog pond, espaliered fruit trees, interesting pathways, and colourful patchwork of allotment parcels, this garden made me realize what was possible. While part of the garden is divided for private use, the common amenities welcome non-gardeners as would a more formal park. But the allotment parcels, with their intensive cultivation, and personalized expression, provide a visual interest that no professional landscaping could approximate.

The common areas and fence at the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Garden provide a similar experience. This fence, with its individually crafted pickets demonstrates the success of this project in incorporating local involvement. In spite of their current

successes, though, both gardens represented struggles by local activists in their implementation. Land use conflicts, as well as local governments who were hostile to the idea made the projects difficult.

Thinking that community gardens were a brilliant use of urban land, with benefits that extend beyond the immediate user, I wished to explore the idea more academically, within an appropriate theoretical framework. It was for this reason I chose the topic as my thesis. In addition, I wished to implement a community garden in my own neighbourhood, and have begun the process. At present, my proposal for such a garden is under review by the Burnaby Parks and Recreation Commission. This combination of both practical and theoretical approaches to the subject has been invaluable. I believe that community gardens are an important consideration for sustainable communities. However, my practical experience has given me some insight into the difficulties that local activists can face in developing community gardens.

I am fortunate enough to be working with a sympathetic planning department- their advice to my community association for getting this project accepted has been invaluable. And projects of this nature represent interesting opportunities - how planners can work with local activists.

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INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

As an urban amenity, community gardens are in heavy demand and rapidly becoming more popular (Saunders, 1996:A1). Their popularity is due in a large part to their multi-faceted benefits on the urban landscape (social, economic, environmental). This thesis discusses community gardens within a broader theoretical framework - community greening and principles of sustainability. It is my objective to demonstrate that the social benefits of community gardens make them a worthwhile urban amenity. In addition, because they are generally maintained and administered through volunteer effort, they are a cost-effective land use strategy for a municipal government. But, also, this thesis recognizes that there are problems in their implementation - perhaps the most serious of which is the opportunity cost of granting scarce recreational land for this purpose. My problem statement therefore is **How can community gardens be implemented to maximize social benefits while overcoming obstacles and minimizing conflicts?** While I have made little distinction between allotment gardens and community gardens, there are subtle differences between the two. Allotments tend to be more individually oriented and centrally controlled, while community gardens feature more common amenities and are more likely to be controlled by a non-profit society.

METHODS

The methods used in exploring this problem statement include a literature review (Chapters 2-3) to provide the theoretical framework for analysis, thus demonstrating the relevance of community gardens to urban planning. There are 4 topics of focus for this

purpose: an historical overview, planning for sustainable communities, social benefits, and obstacles to the implementation of community gardens. This information directs the inquiry of the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Garden case study. The culmination of this research is used to develop a community garden in the North Burnaby Area.

Chapter 2 describes the history of allotment or community gardens, in a European and North American context. The selected examples illustrate the initial conditions leading to the development of allotments, and how these gardens evolved over changing circumstances. Often, their initial function as a subsistence activity shifted to recreation as the gardeners became more prosperous. This section demonstrates that urban agriculture stands the test of time: for this reason, it is a legitimate land use that should be considered as a permanent fixture in the urban landscape. A Canadian example - the Allotment Garden Program of the National Capital Commission program - is detailed in this chapter, with particular reference to its findings, influence, and implications for planning of community gardens as a recreational amenity. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the relevance of community gardens to urban planning, and why they are an incremental step to more sustainable communities.

Chapter 3 draws from available literature to describe the social benefits of and the obstacles to implementing community gardens. This chapter discusses environmental education, and specifically the integration of community garden programs with formal education for children. This section also deals with the difficulty faced in presenting a good case for developing them to local governments: most of the benefits are intangible. Practical problems are discussed (e.g. maintenance issues). As most of the literature on

this topic deals with the United States, this chapter discusses the uniqueness of the Canadian urban context which makes acquiring land for this purpose especially difficult. Chapter 4 deals specifically with the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Garden. This section is drawn from an earlier work submitted to the Mount Pleasant Community as part of a planning project course. This case study demonstrates how a highly motivated group of local activists was able to successfully initiate a community garden project with common areas as well as allotments. In time they were able to build on what they had with their Neighbourhood Fence, a community driven project whereby each picket was made by a different community member. This project demonstrates how a community garden can include community members beyond those immediately given plots.

Chapter 5 details the process of implementing a community garden. It will deal with unique attributes of the site and demographics of the surrounding area. The discussion of this process will include the legal and bureaucratic hurdles a local group must go through to get started. It will also include the communications planning involved with accessing local residents, and with forming a committee for the purpose of starting a community garden. The author's direct experience with this project provided a valuable lesson in political reality.

The goal of this project is to develop this site to accommodate the varied recreational and social needs of local residents. In addition, it will provide economic benefits and enhance the natural environment. The achievement of this goal depends upon meeting the following objectives:

- 1) That community members be contacted for both input and support for this project.

- 2) That potential sources of sponsorship for this project be researched. These sources include all levels of government, and corporations as well.
- 3) That sufficient local volunteer effort be mobilized to make this plan a reality.
- 4) That external organizations be consulted for both support and advice.
- 5) That a communications plan for accessing the various players necessary for successful implementation be developed. (In this thesis, both past and future communications efforts will be detailed)
- 6) That municipal approval for this project be achieved.

This project involves primary research with supporters for a community garden in the North Burnaby Area, and with important resource people (planning professionals, local activists in neighbouring communities). Input from local supporters is crucial for refining the draft plan for a community garden. Advice from resource people offers guidance for implementing this project. For this purpose, advice has been sought from:

- 1) Activists in other areas, who have been successful in implementing similar projects.

They are a valuable source of information.

- 2) The Burnaby Planning Dept.
- 3) Burnaby Parks and Recreation.
- 4) Mike Levenston of City Farmer (Vancouver).

Local organizations such as Burnaby Family Life have agreed to submit letters of support.

A focus group meeting format has been conducted with local supporters. This format is highly appropriate as the information collected will help refine the project. (Greenbaum,

1993:30). Also, as the project requires forming a committee, the focus group style allows for data collection within the normal progress of the project.

The group dynamics that occur when people interact about a topic stimulate the generation of more information that one might get from individual interviews. The synergy among the participants, the sum of their interactions in a group, is greater than the additive value (sic) individual interviews with each of them (sic). An effective moderator can motivate the people in a session to communicate with each other as a way of exploring issues of common agreement or disagreement. This interaction generates a more complete picture of attitudes toward the subject than one would get from individual interviews. (Greenbaum, 1993:28).

Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter. It will synthesize the information given in the preceding chapters to answer the question, **How can community gardens be implemented to overcome obstacles and maximize social benefits?** In addition, it will discuss implications for planning.

A HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACH TO COMMUNITY GARDENS

INTRODUCTION

The history of allotment gardens demonstrates how they developed, and how they were adapted to suit changing circumstances. In North America and Europe, it was initially economic need, most pronounced during war, that gave rise to various forms of urban agriculture for food production. Then in times of relative prosperity, the gardens were developed for recreation. This leisure function is especially evident in certain European allotments, often including small cottages and ornamental plantings. The policies of these allotments often enable overnight stays, making the allotment parcel an important part of the gardener's lifestyle.

The Canadian example may be classified into 6 basic movements or types: these are covered later in the chapter. The most relevant of these is the Open Space System of the current community garden movement. Perhaps the earliest example of this movement was the Allotment Garden Program of the National Capital Commission, an initiative of the federal government in the early seventies. Highly successful, this program has been influential in the development of other Canadian community gardens. The local example of the Strathcona Community Garden reveals the multi-faceted benefits of community gardens.

These historical examples demonstrate the validity of community gardens as a planning interest. The chapter continues by referring to the literature on planning for sustainable communities, to develop a theoretical framework for sustainability. For this purpose,

community gardens are emphasized as an incremental means towards ameliorating the alienating effects of modernity. Community gardens help to achieve this objective by promoting environmental awareness, stewardship of green space, and social equity through shared food production.

GERMANY

The origins of European allotment gardens most likely began in Germany, with Schrebergartens, a name attributed to Dr. Daniel Schreber of Leipzig, who, while not specifically involved in allotment gardening, was an advocate of outdoor recreation and exercise in the mid-nineteenth century. The Schreber Association was formed after Dr. Schreber's death, to continue his work. This group was specifically concerned with outdoor recreation and children's education, and concerned itself with playground development, including children's gardens.

As the children failed to maintain these gardens up to the standards expected of them, the maintenance of these gardens soon fell to their parents. These gardens soon became divided into family plots. Allotment gardening thus became a family activity, an evolution which was consistent with the original objectives of the Association. (Couch & Ward, 1988) This gardening movement combined with summerhouse colonies, giving urban dwellers an escape from the stresses of rapid urbanization in major German cities. These leisure gardeners would often set up small cottages on the city outskirts for weekend and vacation retreats.

In 1919, the Allotment and Small Holding Ordinance, in an attempt to control this development, specified land use guidelines for these sites - the allotments were to be

devoted, in equal parts to, vegetables, fruit production, and recreational areas. The Nazi Party attempted to control the allotment program, maintaining that the allotment holders were to work the land as their duty to the country. At the same time, the allotments offered refuge to those suffering the stresses of war - often sheltering Jews and dissidents. While war-time allotments were most popular (doubtless because of their subsistence function), allotments continue to be used extensively for food production and recreation.

Elsewhere in Western Europe, allotment gardens developed similarly to those in Germany - in response to rapid urbanization and the poverty of war. Then, as the post-war society grew more affluent, the recreation potential of allotment parcels became realized, emphasizing beautification of the site with flowers and ornate cottages, and greater incorporation of the entire family. This shift from pure utilitarian to recreational function has been described as the transition from "allotment gardens to chalet gardens" (Crouch & Ward, 1988).

In the Netherlands, these gardens became more firmly entrenched within planning legislation, as they complement provided by adjacent parks. Patty Lazarowych points out the values attributed to Dutch allotment gardens:

- 1) they are enjoyed by both the gardener and the non-gardener. Their park-like atmosphere makes it enjoyable for pedestrians to stroll them leisurely.
- 2) they offer diversity in the open space landscape in both visual attractiveness and in recreational opportunities.
- 3) they are cost effective, as they are generally maintained by volunteers. (Lazarowych, 1982)

The transformation from “allotment gardens to chalet gardens” happened naturally, as subsistence activities became less essential to the livelihood of the gardeners. These two styles often existed side by side, demonstrating the flexibility with which the users were able to pursue gardening to satisfy their own needs. Crouch and Ward suggest that it is the cooperative spirit between allotment holders and local governments which brings about this smooth transition. Furthermore, because the gardeners are truly able to use the sites as recreational land - meaning overnight stays are either actively encouraged or at least tolerated - the site offers them a means to enhance their lifestyle (Crouch & Ward, 1988).

FRANCE

Allotment holders in the turn of the century France were the working class, recently uprooted peasants with strong bonds to agricultural production. The founding organizer of allotment gardens, Abbe Lemire, a liberal Catholic politician, wanted to promote the gardens as a housing and social policy designed to influence the construction of a society of self-supporting family units. Gardens were praised for their ability to:

- 1) provide recreation
- 2) promote abstinence
- 3) supplement income
- 4) enhance family life

Lemire promoted the allotment societies with a series of festive events, and sought to secure allotment provisions with legislation. In 1941, the gardens received some

protection in law: the poverty and shortages occurring with war increased demand for the gardens. During the postwar period, the demand for allotments began to wane.

Urban expansion in the seventies encroached upon many of the allotment parcels: In 1979 new sites were created through funding and legislation from the Environment ministry.

This period also marked a renewed interest in allotment gardening, especially for younger families. (Crouch & Ward, 1988)

UNITED STATES

As in Europe, US. allotment gardens began in the late nineteenth century. These gardens were intended to supplement the earnings of impoverished workers and new immigrants.

During W.W.I allotments and local food production efforts emphasized conservation of natural resources which could then be devoted to the war effort. Local production required less fuel for the transportation of goods, and less metal for canning produce.

During the depression the gardens helped the unemployed procure their own subsistence, and maintain their sense of self-esteem. Today gardening continues to be highly popular in the United States. (Crouch & Ward, 1988)

CANADA

Moura Quayle, landscape architect professor at UBC, completed a survey of community gardens within Canada in 1986. She distinguished 6 types of community gardening that have occurred in Canadian history. These are:

- 1) Railway Gardens (1890 - 1930)
- 2) School Gardens (1900 -1913)
- 3) War Gardens (1914 -1947)

4) Vacant Lot Gardens (1910 -1920)

5) Counter Culture Gardens (1965 -1979)

6) Community Gardens: Part of a Community Open Space System (1980 to present)

1) The Railway Garden movement was initiated by the CPR to promote public acceptance of the railway, following the example of European allotments. Through time, the community spirit promoted by these gardens gave way to increasing bureaucratization by the CPR, with its greater emphasis upon design standards and horticultural displays. These in turn gave way to perennial landscaping, until, finally, in the 1950's and 60's, the areas became blacktopped to provide parking lots.

2) School Gardens were the product of an educational philosophy towards harmonious living with nature. Flowers and vegetables were the products. However, this movement met its demise with an increasing view towards urbanization as progress (meaning, buying, not producing food). Quayle also credits a commercialization of these gardens, through competitive school fairs, and boys and girls clubs, with hastening their demise.

3) War Gardens were the product of economic necessity, starting with WW1, continuing through the depression, and reaching their height of popularity as the Victory Garden movement of W.W.II.

4) Vacant lot gardens had been largely influenced by Britain's allotment gardening system. The motive behind developing vacant lots grew out of an interest in improving their appearance, as well as a charitable attitude towards the poor. While at their height these gardens were extremely popular, they soon lost their appeal as city dwellers became more affluent, and found different forms of entertainment.

5) The Counter Culture Movement engaged in community gardening as an effort to escape food additives, to regain local control of food production, and reduce energy consumption. Many of the community gardens from this era still exist today. (Quayle, 1986)

6) The Open Space System of the more recent community garden movement evolved out of these previous movements. This approach focuses upon the multi-faceted benefits of community gardens. Quayle suggests that many of the benefits provided by earlier gardens are still relevant today. In addition, modern community gardens often feature more diverse landscapes, such as wildlife habitat:

Today the emphasis is on the broader sustainable landscape involving the wide range of individual (age, sex, and ethnicity), cultural, and environmental concerns. For instance, a Vancouver garden provides a good example of landscape diversity. Part of the site is a wild natural area and bird preserve, complete with shelterbelt plantings. (Quayle, 1989a:24)

Perhaps the earliest demonstration of this movement was an incentive program of the National Capital Commission.

THE NATIONAL CAPITAL COMMISSION

The Allotment Garden Program of this federal body was highly influential in directing the development of community gardens in urban areas. It provided different municipalities in Canada and the United States with information and guidance for developing similar programs. It demonstrated the role that the Federal government can play in fostering community development, and in encouraging local initiative.

The National Capital Commission has a general mandate within the National Capital Act to develop recreational facilities within Canada. Since the seventies, the crown

corporation has assumed a pro-active role in developing urban amenities in anticipation of conflicts due to scarcity of recreational land with a rapidly growing urban population.

Reasoning that planning for these amenities was crucial, the NCC's goals included:

- 1) Setting an example to other Canadian municipalities for promoting recreation as enhancing quality of life.
- 2) Developing cost sharing and cooperative measures between federal and municipal governments to provide the greatest public benefit.
- 3) Encouraging innovative, cost effective, yet popular forms of recreational uses.

In its initial experimental phase, most of the federal land these sites occupied were earmarked for other purposes in different federal programs. It soon became obvious, however, that the program itself was popular enough to justify more permanency.

In 1975, the NCC expanded its program by adapting sites for elderly and handicapped gardeners, and publishing design guidelines for this purpose. The objective of this expansion were to establish greater permanency and user convenience for the allotment holders. This goal was achieved by establishing more numerous, but smaller sites that were closer to user residences than in the earlier phase of the program. In addition, the leases were guaranteed for longer periods - (3-5 years, with options to renew). These changes would make the sites more accessible, reducing vandalism - as users would be able to provide surveillance. It would also make gardening more spontaneous and enjoyable.

Placing sites closer to residences made them more visible, and aesthetic concerns became more prominent. Towards this end, the NCC suggested that the rigid rectangular

structure of its current allotments could be made more attractive and park-like by giving them more natural, flowing shapes that would accommodate curving pathways. These latter two developments, proximity and layout, served to further entrench community gardens as a urban amenity from which multiple benefits could be drawn (beautification of landscape, food production, and recreation).

The success of this program within the Ottawa context demonstrates that community gardens can be seen as a worthwhile permanent fixture in the urban recreational landscape. The NCC concluded that municipal governments should follow its example, and take inventory of their existing open spaces, to determine which lands would be appropriate for community gardening. They suggested that creative, and innovative means could be sought by municipalities to acquire land for this purpose - through negotiation with owners of suitable lands (e.g. corporations), zoning changes, or by leasing arrangements. (National Capital Commission, 1975)

THE INFLUENCE OF THE NCC'S ALLOTMENT GARDEN PROGRAM

Michael Levenston of City Farmer, an urban agriculture consultant, maintains that the NCC's program largely influenced the NDP government of B.C. in the early seventies to implement similar programs, such as the Burnaby Allotment gardens in the mid-seventies. The NCC's program gave community gardens credibility, and political power to local groups wishing to initiate similar projects. (Levenston, 1994)

While the NCC expressed a wish to encourage municipalities, thereby making lower level governments more enthusiastic about community gardens, in practice their success has been limited, at least in Vancouver. For instance, the Vancouver Park Board described

community gardens as a restrictive use, serving a small segment of the population. By contrast, the Board considers a horticultural display to be a non-restrictive use. (Van. Park Board, 1994) One of the goals of the NCC had been to develop landscape techniques that would make the rustic appearance of the community garden more attractive, thus encouraging recreational use for pedestrian walkways and cyclists. However, the Vancouver Park Board does not share that sentiment.

It is unlikely that community gardens will become a "traditional" park use, and as such should be considered a scarce resource. (Van. Park Board, 1994:2)

THE STRATHCONA COMMUNITY GARDEN

The Strathcona Community Garden began in 1985. Forced off their original site in 1987, the gardeners have now been relocated on a 3.6 acre site that was previously an industrial dump. With soil remediation and hard work, plus the tenuous security of a one year lease, the Strathcona group was able to reclaim the soil. Extensive composting (they currently accept one ton of compost per week) was the cost effective means by which they were able to achieve this objective. (Sinclair, 1994) From these humble beginnings, this garden has developed to include four hundred allotment parcels, an orchard, common herb garden, children's play area, beehives, and wildlife habitat (frogs and birds, particularly).

THE STRATHCONA COMMUNITY GARDEN



FIGURE 1 A PLACE TO SIT



PHOTOS
COURTESY
OF ELLIE
EPP

FIGURE 2 A PLACE WHERE EVERYONE IS WELCOME

THE STRATHCONA COMMUNITY GARDEN



FIGURE 3 PATHWAYS THROUGH BEAUTIFUL SCENERY



FIGURE 4 WILDLIFE HABITAT

PHOTOS
COURTESY OF
ELLIE EPP

This highly productive landscape enables food production, recreational facilities, and the development of a strong sense of community. For instance, the gardeners have a surplus table, providing free produce for the surrounding community. Organic restaurants within the area supply compost. The garden's common areas and amenities welcome non gardeners. (Meyer & Moosang, 1992) The presence of the wildlife habitat is a welcome amenity, as it embellishes the urban landscape with birdsong, and frogs chirping on Spring evenings. Given its humble origins, and the amazing accomplishments that the Strathcona group has managed to achieve, this community garden probably represents one of the finest examples of its kind.

TOWARDS A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO COMMUNITY GARDENS

The benefits derived from the Strathcona Community Garden are multifaceted - environmental, social, and economic. As this form of community greening can clearly be so successful, and as it is an unconventional land use option, community gardening clearly deserves some consideration as a planning issue. Community gardens are important elements in working towards sustainable communities. They alleviate some of the alienating aspects of modern lifestyles, restoring a sense of place to the urban context, and instilling an appreciation of its biophysical potential and limitations. They empower neighbourhoods by enabling some self-sufficiency through local food production. Furthermore, community gardens enable cooperative action, because they offer a forum for local residents to meet and work towards common goals. Encouraging an intensive use of green space while making urban living more pleasant, community gardens facilitate lifestyles associated with high density residential styles.

Promoting greater conservation of resources, higher densities are a logical objective for planning sustainable communities.

MODERNITY AND ITS EFFECTS

The social stresses of modern industrial society are deeply rooted. Commenting upon the void filled by the Strathcona Community Garden, Nedjo Rogers states:

In the urban and homogenized landscapes of modernity, sense of place is said to have been displaced by alienation and placelessness. To revive meaning in the world, pre-modern attachments to place have to be reclaimed. (Rogers, 1995:145)

The premodern attachments to land during feudal times were linked to repressive social relations. However, the freedom from this type of social organization has brought a “particularly modern disarticulation of people and place” (Rogers, 1995:xv)

The separation of people from place has enabled new freedoms and opportunities.

However, it has also meant an unprecedented dependence upon the state and market for the satisfaction of basic needs. Modern social conditions have emphasized economic efficiency and the rationalization of the productive process. Previously integrated spheres of human activity have become divided. Conceptually, these divisions are evident: subsistence versus leisure, public versus private, individual versus community, nature versus society, and jobs versus the environment.

In food production, this rationalization process emphasizes short term gain without regard to long term consequences. Duhon’s book, *A History of Intensive Food Gardening*, points out that there is a growing crisis in commercial food production. With soil depletion and topsoil loss there is declining yields relative to fuel and chemical inputs. In addition, this

trend towards large scale farming that is purely focused upon the business end of production has led to the loss of family farms, and strong rural communities. Duhon maintains that it is these communities which offer the best environment for investing in sustainable agricultural practices (Duhon, 1984).

The efficiency of world markets have ensured through imports, a ready supply of fresh food available year round without the hindrance of local weather or seasons. But this obliteration of temporal constraints has in turn fostered a perception that we exist independently of our natural environment. " Since most of us spend our lives in cities and consume goods from all over the world, we tend to view nature merely as a collection of commodities or a place for recreation, rather than the very source of our existence."

(Wagernagel, 1994:1) In general, our collective understanding of nature and our effect upon it comes from within an urban context.

It is a truism that many urbanites think food comes from supermarkets, water comes from faucets, and wastes are simply taken "away". In a democratic society, we cannot expect people to support sustainability policies if they have no experience of the ecological basis of life - our urban areas should demonstrate our dependence on ecological health. Nor can we expect people to support more ecologically appropriate urban lifestyles (e.g., more compact communities, less use of private automobiles) unless our urban areas themselves become healthier. (Roseland, 1992:201-202)

As the infrastructure necessary to our daily lives is administered for us by market forces and government agencies, we have come to take these amenities for granted. Our ready acceptance of the artificial environment alienates us from understanding our existence within an ecosystem. Our functioning as atomized consumers and producers has had profound political effects. Addressing urban alienation, Alan Artibise states: we

are told - and many of us subconsciously believe- that urban places are bad places, where bad things happen. Alternatively, the countryside is a good place where

good things happen, a place where people are more human and God and Nature are more knowable. (Artibise, 1995:p10)

The public perception of urban places is often fearful, full of criminal activity. This anti-urban bias represents serious problems for both urban livability and the political will to change it. Instead, urban dwellers often cope with this fear of their shared public space by closing themselves off from it, by focusing instead upon the safety of their private realm. But this inward focus cuts people off from one another, preventing the formation of a sense of community.

Mobility and privacy have increasingly displaced the traditional commons, which once provided the connected quality of our towns and cities. Our shared public space has been given over to the car and its accommodation, while our private world has become bloated and isolated. As our private world grows in breadth, our public world becomes more remote and impersonal. As a result, our public space lacks identity and is largely anonymous, while our private space strains toward a narcissistic autonomy. Our communities are zoned black or white, private or public, my space or nobody's. The automobile destroys the urban street, the shopping center destroys the neighborhood store, and the depersonalization of public space grows with the scale of government. (Roseland, 1992:248)

The over-accentuation of the private world has, to a large part, given rise to the suburbs, and to urban sprawl - a highly unsustainable land use pattern. Urban sprawl necessitates high consumption of fuel for transportation, as public transit is prohibitively expensive, and greater heating costs (when compared with residences grouped closely together).

COMMUNITY GARDENS - AN INCREMENTAL STEP TO EASING URBAN STRESS

On a small scale, the Strathcona Community Garden challenges modern conventions.

They are a private but also a public space. They reweave social process with nature. They are an image of the countryside in the heart of the city. They achieve some balance in female and male design. They meld manual labour and mental creation. (Rogers, 1995:186)

Perhaps the Strathcona Gardens greatest achievement is that it combines subsistence within leisure. As the garden was developed, its threefold, simultaneous benefits were economic, community development, and ecological regeneration. Because it incorporates volunteer effort, it restores a public realm to urban existence. The Strathcona Garden educates urbanites about subsistence activities with a community involvement that approximates rural living.

As traditional farms become less viable, the concept of urban agriculture provides one alternative for food production and for a better understanding of natural and social systems. Community gardens have proven to be effective community "back yards" to work and visit, and have a very different atmosphere than a public park. As more community gardens become part of our urban landscape, we will grow to appreciate their different aesthetic. Communities may choose to propose a community garden in place of an existing street, on church, fire hall or library sites. These initiatives should be welcomed by the Park Board and the City. (City of Vancouver Urban Landscape Task Force), 1992:40)

To help overcome an impending agricultural crisis, David Duhon looks to smaller scale intensive gardening. He points out that simple modifications to our existing agricultural practices are inadequate for achieving the kind of social change necessary for sustainable economies to develop. For this reason, he looks instead to incremental changes at the community level to implement social change.

You start with an individual, then a family, then neighbors, and work towards a community. You start with compost and high nutrition vegetables and work towards producing much of your own food. You can start in any suburb or urban community garden. A community once established will find its own direction. Today we lack real communities, and without them it is impossible to talk about correcting technologies. (Duhon, 1984:91-93)

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Because city greening projects make urban living more pleasant, they offer greater incentives for more sustainable communities and lifestyles. Sustainable cities

must enable their inhabitants to enjoy lifestyles which consume natural resources conservatively. A crucial means to achieve this objective is to reduce dependency upon private automobiles as principle means of transportation- through encouraging alternative forms of transportation - public transit, cycling, and pedestrian amenities. Maximizing efficiency with public transit is most easily accomplished with densification of residential units. However, densification, while efficient, does not generally allow for a yard or individual growing space.

When combined with a sterile and impersonal public space, there is little opportunity for public input or individual control. In order to make this transition to more sustainable communities, planning is required to ensure that public spaces are inviting, and serve many of the functions normally served by individual backyards. Mark Roseland states, "If

we accept the argument that sustainability requires cities to become more urban, they need also to become more pleasant. One sure way of enhancing the quality of urban life is through "greening" the city. Greening the city means emphasizing an environmental perspective that begins with the city. It means combining urbanism and nature to create cities that are healthy, civilizing, and enriching places to live. (Roseland, 1992: 201-202)

But also sustainable communities need to provide their inhabitants with some sense of stewardship, a recognition of their impact (positive as well as negative) on their surroundings. For many, gardening serves this function. For those without yards, community gardens can augment urban lifestyles. States Moura Quayle:

Growing up with gardens as part of your childhood memories, the thought of never having a garden is unimaginable. Everyone is entitled to cultivate the soil. It is part of our natural and cultural heritage. These sentiments are reflected in a special city landscape - the community garden which provides food for the bodies and spirit for the souls of urban dwellers. (Quayle, 1989b:17)

Community gardens provide their users with an opportunity to work the soil, and to be active participants in creating their external environment. For this reason, they alleviate the alienating effects of modern urban existence by making surroundings more human.

The allotment landscape provides an escape in a way that the town park or other open space, for all its greenery, cannot. However designed for informality, the municipal park remains for recreation and is not a productive landscape where people can grow, create and adapt their own ground (Crouch & Ward, 1989:207).

Because they incorporate urban dwellers into an identification with where they live and empower them to procure a portion of their own subsistence, community gardens are a unique urban amenity, and an incremental step to more sustainable cities.

SUMMARY

Allotment gardens in Europe, the United States, and in Canada often originated from times of relative adversity. They continue to be popular during prosperity, but their leisure function (the pure enjoyment of gardening as a hobby, rather than for food production), becomes more important. The adaptability of this landscape demonstrates that it has benefits which go beyond mere food production - it is also valued as a recreational activity. The presence of allotments can also be welcome to the non-gardener, as it beautifies the landscape for those passing by.

The role of government agencies is clearly important for successful community garden programming, as can be seen by the initiatives of the National Capital Commission. This federal program demonstrates the appropriateness of community gardens in the urban landscape. With an attractive layout and pathways, they could function informally as

public parks. This program was perhaps the earliest attempt in Canada to pursue community or allotment gardens as an open space system.

The Strathcona Community Garden in Vancouver is perhaps one of the finest examples of the multi-faceted benefits that a community garden can provide. Situated in an impoverished area in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, it has enabled the regeneration of wildlife habitat (especially frogs and birds), and it has allowed for social networks to flourish. In addition, it has bolstered the informal economy as gardeners give away their surplus, and accept donations of compost from local restaurants.

Given the success of these current and historical examples, coupled with the fact that government intervention has been an effective means to their implementation, community gardens deserve some recognition as a planning priority. The theoretical approach taken here examines the way that community gardens can alleviate some of the social malaise brought about by modern economic trends, particularly in an urban context.

The individualism fostered in modern industrial society has serious social consequences. When coupled with increasing dependency upon world markets for the satisfaction of human needs, a particularly alienated consumer perspective has emerged. These conditions have undermined the relationship of urbanites to their natural environment and to their larger communities. This sense of placelessness has in turn promoted lifestyles that are unsustainable, and stifled the political will towards social change.

While these problems are too deeply ingrained to be solved by simple solutions, community gardens are a means to incrementally address modern problems. They offer a potential kind of private refuge within a public space. They blur the division between

subsistence and leisure. They enable the economically challenged to supplement their incomes by producing food, promoting social equity. They restore a sense of place to the urban environment, promoting greater ecological awareness. They provide a meeting ground for neighbours to work together. Finally, they enhance urban existence, facilitating a transition to greater density in residential styles. It is for these reasons that community gardens are an important component of sustainable communities.

The following chapter moves from the theoretical to the concrete by focusing specifically on the social benefits of community gardens, and the obstacles to their implementation.

Chapter 3 COMMUNITY GARDENS - SOCIAL BENEFITS AND OBSTACLES

INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter introduced the multifaceted benefits of community gardens within a broad theoretical framework. This chapter presents more specific examples of how community gardens provide individual or collective benefits. Individual benefits include horticultural therapy, skills acquisition, and income supplements through food production. Collective benefits include increased local involvement, community development, and environmental education.

In spite of their social benefits, however, local activists often have to overcome various hurdles before they can successfully implement community gardens. The latter part of this chapter focuses upon obstacles faced by activists in implementing and maintaining community gardens, and how potential problems can be dealt with. Quayle's research suggests that the attitudes of municipal planners to community gardens can be a hindrance to their implementation - a summary of her findings and its implications is included here.

This chapter includes an overview of relevant bylaws found in existing community gardens, thereby addressing some of the more practical problems faced by community gardeners. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the relative benefits of a top down versus a bottom up approach to the implementation of community gardens.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

In her *Report on Community Gardening*, Quayle states that the most valued social benefits included social diversity, a place to garden, economy, increased self-sufficiency,

production of good quality food, and providing a livelihood, especially for seniors.

(Quayle, 1986:p16) In the Lower Mainland, Community gardens as a land use option has become more timely and significant in recent years. Vancouver Councilor Nancy Chivario, a proponent of community gardens, believes that public acceptance and enthusiasm for community gardens has blossomed all over the city. As urban areas densify, there will be ever greater numbers of residents without yards who will enjoy the benefits of gardening provided by this amenity. Because community gardens offer a forum for local residents to meet, they help to build a sense of community - an especially important feature for those who would otherwise feel impoverished, and alienated in their urban environment.

While these benefits certainly improve the lifestyles of those who can enjoy them, the therapeutic value of gardening activity has been well established. A 1990 study by Bernadine Cimprich reported severe emotional trauma among breast cancer patients, who suffered especially from an inability to focus their attention and manage their lives. When these patients participated in gardening activities, they showed far quicker recovery than patients who did not engage in such restorative activity. (Malakoff,1995:6) Malakoff also points to psychologist's findings that community greening makes people more productive, as it gives their mind a rest, and teaches them patience. "The long, slow process of planting a garden and nurturing healthy plants can teach an important lesson to both children and adults in our fast-paced society." (Malakoff, 1995:7)

This aspect of gardening is an important factor in the philosophy behind Horticultural Therapy - that by developing gardening programming within the patient's capability, the

therapist can help raise knowledge, motivation, confidence, satisfaction, and physical coordination levels in those seeking rehabilitation. In this discipline, the knowledgeable therapist acts as teacher, guiding patients through the realm of botany and horticulture. The physical challenge of such actions as potting plants can develop fine motor skills. Color and number sense can be improved and tested by incorporating them into a curriculum featuring colored pots, and counting seeds. Furthermore, the slow but steady response of plants to care and attention rewards patients for their efforts, thus empowering them. (Brooks & Oppenheim, 1973)

THE ROLE OF GREENING IN THE COMMUNITY

Community greening helps to create a more pleasant physical environment, moderating temperature (energy saving), noise and pollution. Exposure "to green plants can help reduce stress - especially in urban areas, where excessive noise and movement can make stress levels rise" (Malakoff, 1995:6). Stress reduction and other psychological benefits is the prime motivation for most middle and upper class American gardeners. "Community gardens obviously provide for the same types of human needs as those experienced in home and backyard gardens." (Malakoff, 1995:14) Collectively, community gardens foster pride in the community, enhancing its image. They provide a forum for residents to meet and collaborate in constructive effort. (Malakoff, 1995:6) As they accomplish this role, these residents develop skills, enabling them to take on a leadership role, organizing their neighbours, to initiate and to maintain the project. For many, community greening is their first experience with civic participation. For instance, Malakoff reports that inner city gardeners in Chicago acquired important skills as they collaborated with their civic

government in developing community greening projects. (Malakoff,1995:6) These skills can provide job training. "Community greening projects have been a training ground for people interested in entering the industry, particularly in inner-city areas where jobs can be scarce and skills hard to acquire." (Malakoff,1995:6) Encouraging self-sufficiency, community greening (and particularly community gardens) help the poor, especially the homeless. "The spaces provide opportunities for neighborhood residents to develop and control part of their neighborhood, an advantage not afforded by traditional parks." (Malakoff, 1995:8) Relying upon volunteer effort for their grounds maintenance, community gardens are a highly cost effective means to manage open space. (Quayle, 1986:19) This attribute ought to make implementing community gardens highly attractive to cash strapped municipal governments. Community gardens also provide important income supplements through enabling food production. In the United States, the 1992 estimated dollar value of produce amounted to \$250.00 per community gardener.

(Mattson et al, 1994: 13). Community gardens can also stimulate the local economy :

Urban food production also enhances both informal and formal economies. Local trading and bartering occurs for land, equipment, seeds, compost, fencing, time, information, and educational materials. An increase in urban food production results in increased business at local greenhouses, nurseries, and garden supply outlets. (City of Toronto, 1993:8-9)

As gardening is one of the few activities that people from all walks of life engage in, community gardens can serve an important role in bridging the cultural gaps between community members, particularly in culturally diverse neighbourhoods. "People garden whether they live in rural areas, in the suburbs, or in the innermost, built-up, teeming portions of cities" (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989:164). Community greening also helps to

preserve cultural heritage by enabling people to grow plants that play an important role in their culture's food or rituals.

Community greening projects often utilize composted wastes to condition and fertilize the soil. By doing so, these projects can help municipal governments save money by recycling organic wastes that would otherwise occupy space in landfill sites. (Malakoff, 1995:7)

Such composting programs help to increase public awareness of environmental issues - when seen in this light, community gardens can serve an educational function, serving the broader community. "A new role is education to promote sustainable landscapes which involves environmental, cultural, and individual factors". (Quayle, 1989a:26)

Cultural diversity is supported by a greater educational and social focus appealing to all ages. Performance programming should include spiritual and celebratory events. Community gardens, as cultural legacies, witness the layering of attitudes to the land and gardening handed down from generation to generation. Individual growth results from participating in the evolution of the garden and enjoying the variety of garden experiences. (Quayle, 1989a: 26)

AIMS OF ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Applying equally to both schools and to the broader community, environmental education aims to develop:

- environmental awareness and knowledge of human interactions with nature, both locally and globally.
- a diverse skill bank for approaching environmental issues and related decision-making with input from biology, economics, and technology.
- promotion of an environmental ethic, utilizing human knowledge to appreciate and protect natural resources and human welfare.

- integration of knowledge, skills, and commitment towards environmental protection and balancing development with conservation. (Roseland, 1992:253-254).

The Cleveland Pubic School system has successfully integrated community garden program within its curriculum "with more than 4,000 children renting plots on ninety-two acres of land in the City of Cleveland" (Coe, 1978: 32). Its objectives include environmental education, promoting good work habits, and teaching social responsibility - by getting students to participate in schoolground maintenance.

Children were generally fascinated with the program, and developed skills in cooperative behavior, along with displaying individual initiative. Initially establishing territorial rights over their allotment parcels, the children began to share plots, sometimes even caring for the plots of vacationing friends. In addition to developing social skills, the combination of the community gardening program with an academic curriculum gave the children an educated enthusiasm for living things, and predisposed them to environmental awareness.

Schools that integrate horticulture with an academic curriculum are tapping a vast resource for environmental protection, because a responsibility for living things can become a good habit if instilled young. (Coe,1978:32)

OBSTACLES

While the benefits of community gardens are numerous, and successful examples exist, in practice they have been difficult to implement, at least in Vancouver. For instance, the American Community Gardening Association has substantial literature about community gardens in the United States. However, the Canadian example is clearly different from that of the United States - as in Canada, urban land is more difficult to obtain. As the inner cities of the United States are typically sites of urban decay and abandonment,

acquiring land for community gardens is less of a problem (although the permanency of that site and its potential toxicity is still a problem). However, Canadian cities are more likely to have functioning, vibrant city centres, utilizing land more intensively. Compared to American cities, there is greater demand in Canadian urban centres for available space: activists with community garden proposals will have greater competition for their chosen site. For a local government, granting land for this purpose represents an opportunity cost: other recreation uses cannot be realized, or increased revenues from the sale of that land will not be obtained.

Local groups may not have the political power to make the project seem worthwhile. They have to present their project to a local government and citizens who may feel threatened and hostile to any such project that is slated for their home turf. Funding represents a problem. And finally, once approval is obtained, local activists are likely to have problems with the maintenance of the site, ensuring that all participants do their share to keep the grounds tidy and weed free.

POLITICAL POWER

In typological "movements" the gardens were often supported by bureaucratic entities such as the CPR, the Rural Schools Fund, or the Department of Agriculture. Today, while start-up funding often comes from parks departments or municipalities, the initiative is coming more and more from private citizens' groups, drawn from the energy of individuals. (Quayle, 1989a:24)

Within the Greater Vancouver context, there is generally no "top-down" initiation of community gardens. Instead, it is local activists who lobby local governments for the land, and who mobilize volunteer effort among themselves. Moura Quayle found that in the

Canadian context, the gardens are typically run by volunteer effort only - rarely do gardens benefit from having paid coordinators to run them. While they have had remarkable success in implementing successful community garden programs, local activists have rarely been successful without a long period of waiting for municipal approval. This is especially true of older, locally initiated gardens such as the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Garden or Strathcona.

Activists have to prove the merits of their projects to local politicians who must assess them against those of other projects. But the benefits of community gardens are often intangible and politically may seem less defensible than other, more profitable schemes.

While highway builders and developers can produce reams of data that demonstrate the social and economic benefits of their projects, greeners are often armed with little more than a heart-warming anecdote about cabbages sprouting amidst urban squalor. (Malakoff, 1995:5)

To prove their case, local activists must access potential supporters within their neighbourhoods before the garden is commenced - a difficult task. With little money to advertise, typically local activists can rely only upon posters, community association meetings, word of mouth and door to door recruiting - an effective but time consuming means of communication.

PERMANENCE

Because community gardens typically devote some or all of their space to individual allotments, concerns about designating land for exclusive use arise. The Vancouver Park Board maintains that the opportunity cost of such a designation (i.e. effectively preventing use by the general public) is too great to make a long term commitment justifiable. For

this reason, the Board stresses that land should not be granted on a long term basis (more than five years) for this purpose. (Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 1994) But short term leasing agreements restrict the way that community gardens can develop. For instance, it might seem pointless to plant fruit trees or invest a lot of effort when only a short term lease is obtained.

It is pleasing to imagine gardens with picnic areas, volleyball courts, portable toilets, tool houses, and a central meeting place, but until secure permanent site legislation is enacted, such embellishments are only found in the most established and financially secure programs. (Coe, 1978: 93).

Clearly, community gardens must become legitimated within public perception and the municipal planning process before they can acquire greater permanency. In the Vancouver example, this process has happened on a case by case basis. Strathcona and the Mount Pleasant Garden both had had their leases extended to 10 years, whereas initially they were only given one or two year leases.

Until zoning is in place to protect non-traditional open space, this land tenure problem will continue. Sustainable landscapes such as community gardens must be considered a bona fide land use. (Quayle, 1989a:25)

It is important to acknowledge that substantial capital funding from taxpayer's money goes into providing recreation opportunities that not all of the general public can afford to enjoy. For instance, in a recent Vancouver Sun article, it was pointed out that tax dollars are spent for providing skiing amenities, for the enjoyment of a privileged minority. (Hanna, 1996: B5) Similarly, Burnaby Parks and Recreation have allocated \$220,000.00 for golf course maintenance in their 1996 budget (Burnaby Recreation and Cultural Services, 1996, G22). When seen in this light, the minimal land and resources given to the

provision of community gardens gives them greater legitimacy in the urban landscape. It also demonstrates that the issue of inclusive versus exclusive use applies equally to other recreational facilities already receiving massive funding from government sources.

NEIGHBOURHOOD ACCEPTANCE

While local politicians have their own reservations about granting land for community gardens, local citizens may also be opposed to a project that will bring outsiders into their communities. Also, the novelty of the concept may be intimidating to homeowners, concerned with the impact of such a project in their neighbourhood, and the effect it will have upon property values.

Local reaction to increased urban food production will vary with the scale, intensity, and aesthetic of a project with perhaps little opposition to edible landscaping in open space, more with front yard gardens, and the most with urban model farms. For example, citizens may not appreciate the beauty of food plants or the stages of their growth. They might, at first, consider community gardeners as "strangers" in their neighbourhood. (City of Toronto, 1993:13)

If local residents are accustomed to the aesthetic of the professional horticultural display, they will likely experience difficulty accepting that of the more personalized community garden. Quayle distinguishes two aesthetic standards for evaluating landscaping: pedigreed (meaning professionally maintained, mowed, pruned) and non-pedigreed (meaning more personalized expression and less conventionally tidy). Community gardens fall into this latter category. Quayle was confident that over time, urban aesthetic standards would grow more accepting of the non-pedigreed landscape (Quayle, 1986:17). In the meantime, however, this productive landscape can be viewed as unkempt - a problem for those trying to sell the idea in the community. (Quayle, 1986:17) But it is

also possible that neighbours will appreciate the added security of having more street level activity as a means of providing informal staggered hour surveillance. They may appreciate the productive use of available land, possibly with the integration of vegetables and flowers. (City of Toronto, 1993:13).

FUNDING PROBLEMS

The economic costs involved in developing community gardens are often not realized in the plot rental fees. Moura Quayle lists average annual maintenance costs at \$28.00 per year, while the annual fees averaged \$20.00. (Quayle, 1986:16) However, this total does not include startup costs, which includes soil and site preparation, infrastructure (outhouses, water connection, fencing). Community groups often rely on external funding for startup costs, and city departments often provide only minimal assistance.

POLICING OF SITE - BYLAWS, ETC. ENFORCING RESPONSIBILITY

Once a community group acquires a site, they are still faced with the problem of enforcing group responsibility for its maintenance.

It's crucial to the survival of our society and the gardens itself that people realize when they sign up for plots, that they must contribute in some real fashion within their physical capabilities to help with the upkeep and overall maintenance of the garden site.... All too frequently, a small group of dedicated people (too often the same people year after year) toil away to keep the place looking well-groomed and orderly while others who enjoy the benefits of gardening will either ignore requests to come out and help, or find excuses to avoid being there. (MacRae, 1994:5)

While the common areas on the site present special problems to mobilize volunteer effort, there are also problems with the upkeep of individual plots. Each plot is individually maintained, and therefore gardeners neglecting their responsibility will be obvious.

However, different members will have different standards of acceptable conduct for their sites. But these different standards will nevertheless have implications for neighbouring gardeners. Failure to pull weeds could mean that airborne seeds get transported to the plots of more meticulous neighbours. Similarly, an inadequate fall cleanup means that habitat for overwintering garden pests will remain. While these differences in conduct can lead to interpersonal problems between members, failure to maintain the site adequately can also politically damage the permanency of that site. The attractiveness and upkeep of the site are essential for both maintaining morale among members and for providing a good image to neighbours and local politicians.

Potential conflicts also exist with the different lifestyles and gardening practices of individual gardeners. For instance, dog owners may wish to bring their pets to the site while they garden, but these can be difficult to control. Those wishing to grow tall plants or erect trellising may block the sun from their neighbour's plot.

These problems are probably best dealt with through bylaws negotiated by the group. Consultation with other established community gardening groups to find out what problems they faced, and how they dealt with them would benefit groups initiating such a project. For instance, requiring members to pay a "damage" deposit, to be returned after fall cleanup is completed ensures better attendance to this task. And some coordination of the orientation of garden structures (trellising, etc.) helps to give maximum sunlight to all plots. Theft and vandalism are, however, among the most common problems on most garden sites, and they are probably the most difficult to deal with (Quayle, 1989b: 20).

PLANNER'S ATTITUDES TO COMMUNITY GARDENS

In her survey of community gardens in Canada, Moura Quayle determined that urban planners show little enthusiasm for community gardens. In response to her questionnaire, most planners thought that while land was available, there was insufficient demand to justify designating land for this purpose. From her survey, Quayle discerned the following:

- 1) There is little interest amongst planners for community gardens
- 2) Few planners see themselves in the role of advocate for community gardens.
- 3) Those with community gardens within their jurisdiction identify few problems with them
- 4) Those without community gardens anticipated several problems, including chemical storage, manure spreading, unattractiveness, and other problems associated with agricultural use. These planners were least likely to define community gardens as a multi-faceted recreational use intensely utilizing vacant land. (Quayle, 1986)

IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING

Quayle noted that in many instances, community gardens were implemented by government agencies: albeit often at the request of community groups. For this reason, insufficient demand for community gardens may be at times assumed because there had been no public request for providing this amenity. If this is so, then "It may well be that many municipalities will never have community gardens because the planning department will not be asked to provide them". (Quayle, 1986:10) It is therefore questionable whether local groups have enough information at their disposal enable them to implement

these projects. Quayle concluded that given the benefits of community gardens, and the problems associated with commencing them, that planners should assume an advocacy role in their implementation. By contrast, a Mount Pleasant activist thought that planners should not be proactive, but instead should facilitate local residents in the implementation of community gardens. The role of planners should be as a bridge between local groups and municipal governments.

Nancy Chivario, a Vancouver Councillor and proponent of community gardens, believes that they should be given equal value to other uses of recreational land, such as playgrounds. The surrounding neighbourhood context should be the determining factor for ascribing use (e.g., what is needed, who is being served, what are the demographics in the area, etc.). For this reason, Chivario believes this topic should be dealt with on a case by case basis. (It would be inappropriate to designate land for such a purpose without consultation, she believes). Chivario also maintains the importance of allowing for land use revisions, as neighborhood recreational needs can change over time. For this reason, she states, time limited leases are most appropriate.

CENTRALIZED VERSUS LOCAL CONTROL

The top down and the bottom up approach to community gardens each have benefits and costs. A government agency can be crucial for initiating a community garden. However, local initiative is extremely important as well. Through volunteer effort, a community group can succeed in reclaiming land, ameliorating the soil. Typically, these groups have a greater tendency to utilize human labor, rather than mechanical devices, to prepare the soil. In the Strathcona Gardens, in Vancouver, for instance, some of the volunteers

transported compost to the site by bicycle (Sinclair, 1994:9). Volunteer effort makes community gardens more cost effective than those controlled by a central agency. It also enables greater intensification of uses, as highly intensive soil cultivation, such as raised beds, cannot be as easily implemented with mechanical means. Furthermore, perennials cannot be successful on soil that is indiscriminately plowed over. (the Ottawa Allotment Garden Program of the National Capital Commission plowed over plots every fall.)

The plot allocation system of a central agency by necessity undermines the community spirit present in a locally controlled community garden. For instance, community groups might wish that participants showing greatest commitment to the gardens should be granted allotments. In addition, they might prefer to give priority to those living closest to the site, then allowing outsiders to lease once local demand is filled. While this attitude might on the surface seem parochial, there is a practical justification for it. Local activists do not want community gardens to become "commuter gardens". As they are an enhancement to the urban lifestyle, it is important that they are located within walking or cycling distance from user residences. Furthermore, community gardens require a strong volunteer effort for their maintenance. Promoting stewardship of a site is best accomplished by making it an integral part of the neighbourhood. (The Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Gardeners have assisted those seeking plots by encouraging them to start gardens in their own areas. In this way, established community gardens can be important resources for new projects.) (Ross, 1996)

By contrast, central agencies are most likely to allocate on a first come, first served basis. This system might promote more equitable sharing of allotments space, preventing social

cliques from monopolizing the allotment process. However, those showing the greatest commitment to the site (by engaging in such activities as weeding the common areas, etc.) would fail to have an advantage when they apply for a lease. Central agencies and local groups may also differ in where they are likely to choose to locate a community garden. A government agency might try to put the garden in a spot that would minimize conflict - away from local residences. (Which would appear to be the case with the Burnaby Allotment and Regional Gardens). However, locating a community garden away from residences leads to other problems, as Quayle points out:

in a rural setting, fewer problems would arise in terms of vandalism, a long term site, and conflicts with adjacent land uses. However, a user group problem would arise. In limiting community gardens to rural areas only the most mobile and avid gardeners would likely participate. Those who could not afford commuting costs would be neglected. As community gardens are meant for everyone municipalities are obliged to make them accessible.(Quayle, 1986:10)

By contrast, local activists would be more likely to identify a site that was closer and more accessible to their residences. They might even choose smaller sites with poorer soil than a larger, more distant site.

SUMMARY

Community gardens have great social value because they enhance urban living. In particular, they allow users to become more self-sufficient, an important consideration for the economically disadvantaged. Because they must work cooperatively on a collectively maintained piece of land, community gardens encourage the development of social skills. Those possessing leadership qualities begin to reveal themselves. These newly acquired political skills can have broader reaching benefits, including local empowerment.

Community gardens also promote greater stewardship of the natural environment by giving participants a chance to work the soil. Because of this more active involvement, community gardens give a sense of place, thus promoting greater environmental awareness. When combined with programming that incorporates local residents, community gardening can be an important tool for environmental education. Educators can successfully integrate gardening into their school curriculum, as shown by the Cleveland public school example.

While local initiative can often initiate and maintain community gardens in a highly cost-effective manner, local groups often experience difficulty getting their proposals approved by municipal governments. Local activists must actively recruit local support, often with labor intensive means (door to door, posters, community meetings). They have to deal with lack of funding for more elaborate communications plans, and they also may have to convince local residents who may be concerned about the potential negative effects of such a project in their neighbourhoods. Furthermore, they may have difficulty expressing the merits of such a project as these may be intangible. Local governments frequently are uneasy about approving a site for what they will consider to be an exclusive use. Because of this concern, the Vancouver Park Board has recommended not to grant leases for longer than 5 years.

But a lack of permanency restricts the types of amenities that community gardens can reasonably provide. For this reason, Moura Quayle suggests that community gardens be legitimated through zoning, and that planners should assume a greater role in the implementation of community gardens. It is necessary to have a balance between

governments and local initiative for successful community gardening programming.

Potentially, local governments could effectively initiate projects, while local groups could administer sites through volunteer effort, making them highly cost effective.

The purpose of the Mount Pleasant case study is to show how community gardens can be developed to include non-gardener, and that, with adequate common features, the gardens can serve many of the functions of more traditional parks.

The Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Garden, discussed as a case study in the next chapter, has developed programming, projects, and common areas to include non-gardeners.

Chapter 4 CASE STUDY: THE MOUNT PLEASANT NEIGHBOURHOOD GARDEN

The Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Garden was started in 1988 on park land at 7th Avenue and Fraser St. in Vancouver. It is small by comparison to the Strathcona Community Garden (about 100 by 122 feet). However, it also features common areas and programming to include non-gardeners. In 1994, the garden became the basis for an innovative public art project. This was the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Fence.

The Mount Pleasant area was one of the first in Vancouver to initiate a community garden. Most of the accomplishments of this community have been initiated by local residents, with little assistance from city hall staff. Their actions were in response to social changes brought about by developments outside of their control. Since the seventies, zoning changes favoring densification led to massive redevelopment schemes.

Nondescript 3 storey walkups replaced existing residences - destroying many architecturally interesting heritage buildings. There was little sensitivity to existing assets,

the already diverse social mix, and the design guidelines were insufficient to ensure the attractiveness of new development. The scale of these changes were too rapid for the community to adjust. As a result, the area turned into a low rent slum. People no longer had pride in their community - this atmosphere seemed to attract social problems. It was in response to this erosion of community spirit that the Mount Pleasant group got motivated. (Ross, 1996)

By Lower Mainland standards, the area is inadequately served by recreational land. In spite of this, however, the Mount Pleasant Community has managed to make the most of land that is available. The landscaping projects that this community have implemented so successfully are a tribute to their ability to mobilize their human resources. In addition, the Mount Pleasant community acknowledges help from local politicians, academics, design professionals, and gardening specialists. (Ross, 1996)

BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY GARDENS

In 1987, the Mount Pleasant per capita income was 25% lower than the Vancouver average. Specifically, 36% of the population depended upon public subsidies as their main means of support (Mount Pleasant Citizens Planning Committee, 1987). It was anticipated that this segment of the population would benefit most from having community gardens available. The financial supplement from gardening in a Mount Pleasant plot was not substantial as the size of the gardens (less than 200 square feet) limited the amount that could reasonably be grown. However, the garden provides important dietary enhancements for the gardeners, as well as a low cost recreational activity. In addition, the Mount Pleasant gardeners are a diverse cultural mix, with a substantial portion having

English as a second language. The presence of the garden acts as an important bridge between local residents.

Other social benefits from the gardens included skills development. For instance, this garden's fence project was initiated 5 years after the garden began by 2 of its members. These gardeners assumed a leadership role, directing a varied group of community members involved in constructing individual pickets.

The presence of the garden has proven to be beneficial for those local residents who do not garden there. For instance, some local residents add their food scraps to the communal compost bin on the site. Teachers take their students to the site as part of their educational curriculum, promoting environmental awareness. (In addition, plots are allocated for children's groups). More vague community benefits include providing a sense of place, influencing a decision to reside there longer, thus reducing transiency. (Ross, 1996).

THE MOUNT PLEASANT COMMUNITY FENCE

The success of the community garden at this site led to another highly successful project: the Mount Pleasant Community Fence, which now encloses the garden. This project was inspired by a similar one in Australia, whereby each picket in the fence enclosure would be created by a different community member. Artist and local resident Pat Beaton approached the Grunt Gallery with the idea; in response, they applied for provincial funding to hire four people to oversee the project and for operating expenses. This project proceeded in collaboration with other community centers which provided additional volunteer support. These included the Mount Pleasant Community Centre and

Neighborhood House and the following schools: Queen Alexandra, Nightingale Elementary, Charles Tupper, and Vancouver Technical. The wide reach of these organizations brought a diverse blend of participants to the project:

Mount Pleasant School children, seniors, artists, gardeners, residents- even an entire family of seven that is working on pickets at home- have taken wholeheartedly to the task over the past month, including attending community workshops that help them to get used to the design process. (Wilson, 1994: C6)

These workshops were held in various locations such as the Mount Pleasant Community Center, local schools, and the Grunt Gallery itself. Participants, many of whom had never used woodworking tools before, were assisted as they created pickets of their own design. For safety reasons, children created their designs on cardboard templates which were then transferred to red cedar slats. The pickets were left unpainted, in keeping with the garden's organic theme. Designs and details were achieved by using woodburning tools. Completed in the spring of 1994, the fence has generated a vast range of media attention, from local and provincial newspapers to magazines, radio, and television. Politically, the fence is very successful. It represents the collective nature of the garden. "The fence is a symbol of what happens in the garden," states Pat Beaton. "The helpers weren't all allotment gardeners."

Within the garden, there is a communal compost, picnic facilities, and a herb garden for everyone to enjoy. Furthermore, local organizations, such as the Boy Scouts have allotment parcels. In addition, there is a children's garden. These shared facilities demonstrate that the garden serves a much wider purpose than merely allotments for those fortunate enough to have obtained them. For this reason, amenities such as the

community fence, herb garden, and picnic area challenge the Park Board's former assertion that community gardens are an exclusive use.

OBSTACLES

NEIGHBOURHOOD AND POLITICAL ACCEPTANCE

When they were first starting out, the Mount Pleasant Community found little resistance to their project from adjacent neighbours. Neighbours tended to be more incredulous, believing that the project was doomed to succumb to the ravages of vandalism. For this reason, neighbours tended to think the project was more of a wasted effort. However, the Mount Pleasant activists took the position that neighbourhood decay was one of the crucial reasons why the garden was so important. They were not immune to security concerns however - their decision not to have an outhouse was based on this concern. The Mount Pleasant group did, however encounter some problems in dealing with their municipal government and staff. The professionally trained Vancouver Park Board staff have experienced some difficulty giving priority to developing scarce land for community gardens. They reason that community gardens are an exclusive land use, serving a smaller segment of the population, denying enjoyment to the general public. By contrast, the Park Board concludes that horticultural displays, tennis courts, playing fields, and playgrounds are non-restrictive uses serving a broader user population. This land use conflict is further exacerbated by the fact that the Mount Pleasant area is park deficient. (City of Van. Plan. Dept., 1989)

The Park Board strategy to create Mount Pleasant park land has been to buy land and demolish the buildings on it. However, this action could lead to conflicts with heritage preservation, as was pointed out by Nancy Chivario in May 1988. (Buttle, 1988) The Mount Pleasant Neighborhood Garden was implemented on such a site.

The Mount Pleasant community was initially given a one year lease to develop this site. The following year, it was given a two year lease. In spite of its popularity, however, it faced termination in its third year (1990), when the Vancouver Park Board wanted to have the site completely dedicated to more traditional park land. Gavin Ross pointed out at this time that the use of the site for a garden was compatible with the objectives of the Park Board, and that community gardens were "a good example of recreation". (Buttle, 1990) The garden has survived its tenuous beginnings, however, and moved on to become highly successful.

ENCOURAGING RESPONSIBILITY

The Mount Pleasant group recognizes that in order to have their leases renewed, maintaining the site to an acceptable standard is crucial. For this reason they have friendly but effective means to encourage responsible gardening. When they notice that a site is poorly maintained, they deal with the person directly. If poor maintenance results in a dispute with neighbouring gardeners, those involved are encouraged to contact the offending party and resolve the dispute themselves. Gardeners are given one year to improve. Failing that, they simply are not allowed to renew their leases. Usually, gardeners showing a lack of interest simply fade away and do not dispute their expulsion. The Mount Pleasant group is fairly relaxed about policing the site, however. Problems are

infrequent, and they feel that an occasional neglected plot left fallow might actually benefit the soil.

This informal process accompanies a short list of regulations regarding conduct. They have an organic only policy, an April 30 deadline for planting, and about 4 meetings per year. Their bylaws are drafted or revised at these meetings, where emergent problems and concerns are dealt with. These meetings are conducted as social gatherings, with some time devoted to administrative tasks. The Mount Pleasant gardeners are a diverse social mix - many of them are not comfortable in a meeting format. Roaming dogs were a serious problem before the fence was erected. Dogs are allowed within the garden, as long as they are on a leash.

FUNDING

The yearly lease for a plot in this garden is \$10.00. From each of the 45 plots, this fee covers the costs of an annual budget of roughly \$500.00, supplemented with occasional grants. The budget covers the costs of services such as water, tools, and manure every two years. The Mount Pleasant group acknowledges that at times they overlook when gardeners fail to make payments. For some gardeners, even this low \$10.00 fee is too much to pay.

MOUNT PLEASANT NEIGHBOURHOOD GARDEN



BRIDGES THE GAPS BETWEEN CULTURES



PROVIDES BENEFITS FOR ALL AGES

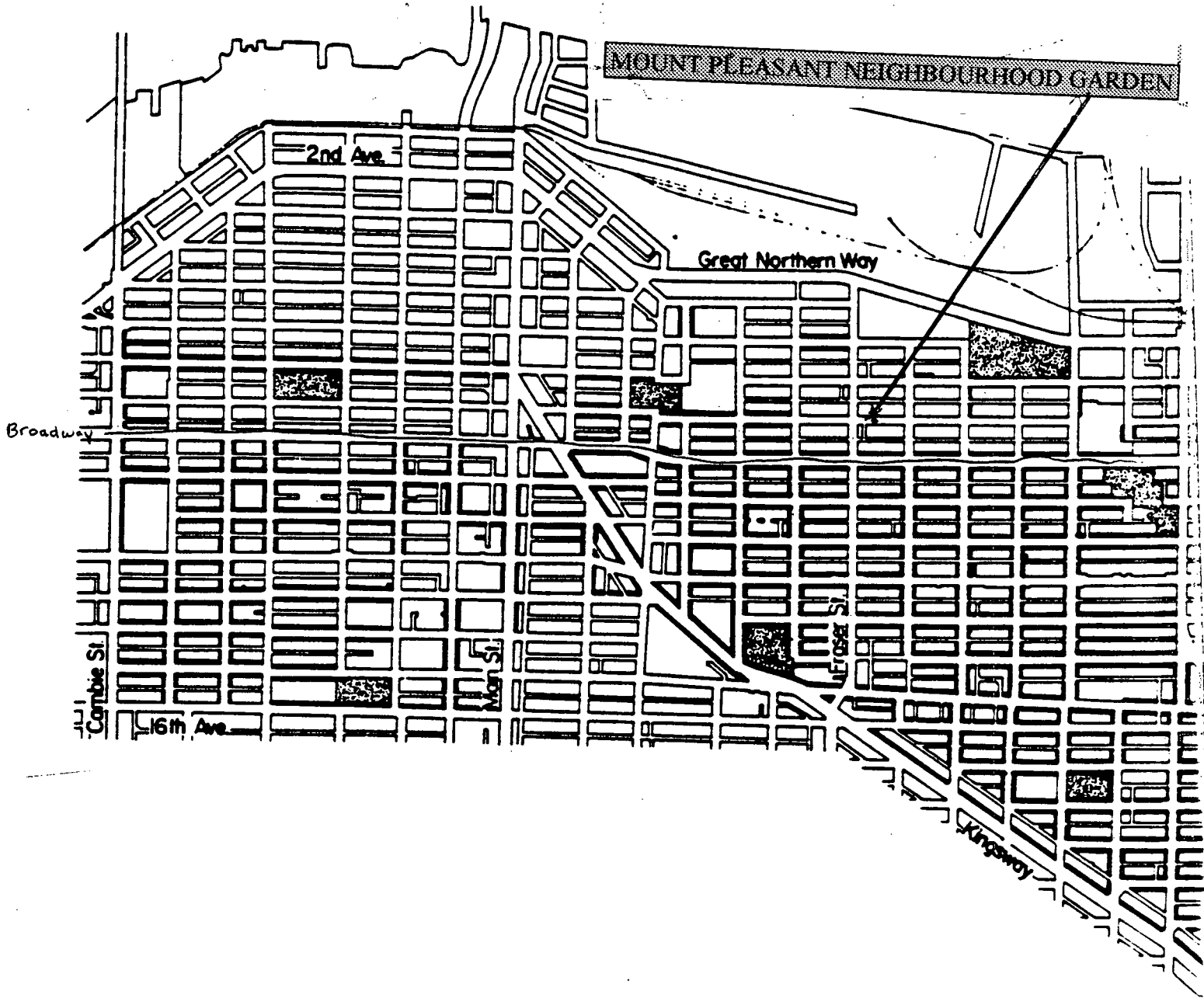
MOUNT PLEASANT NEIGHBOURHOOD GARDEN



MOBILIZING LOCAL INITIATIVE IN THE FENCE PROJECT
THE FINISHED FENCE - COMMUNITY CREATED PUBLIC ART



MOUNT PLEASANT
CONTEXT MAP



PARK BOARD GUIDELINES

Because it has been so successful, the Mount Pleasant Neighborhood Garden has continued to gain popularity within the community and acceptance with the Vancouver Park Board. On April 18, 1994, a representative of the community garden appeared before the board and was granted a five year lease with an additional five year option. As the project had commenced with only a one year lease, this ten fold increase represents a substantial political victory. Also in May, 1994, the Mount Pleasant community received approval to develop a community gardens on another site - the Jonathan Rogers site at 8th and Manitoba St. At the same time, the parks commissioners felt the need to develop policies for the implementation of community gardens. They instructed the Park Board staff to carry out this responsibility. The Park Board in turn produced their "Report on Community Gardens on Park Sites". Within this document, the bias of the Park Board staff against a long term dedication to community gardens is made explicit:

Staff are of the opinion that, because of the exclusivity of some non-traditional use, any leases should be short term, certainly no longer than five years...
(Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation, 1994:2)

The Mount Pleasant gardeners report being comfortable with a 5 year lease. The representative I spoke with felt that a term of this length did not prohibit planting perennials and was not unduly disruptive in their gardening programming.

OTHER COMMUNITY LANDSCAPE INITIATIVES

The parks deficient Mount Pleasant community recognizes value in the small spaces that are available. They currently are involved in planting decorative plants on transportation

amenities, such as traffic circles and corner bulges. This program, called Green Streets, is a joint venture between the City of Vancouver and the Mount Pleasant Community Center. For this purpose, the Mount Pleasant Community Centre has published a set of guidelines and safety tips for gardening on these small sites.

SUMMARY

In spite of its small size, the Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Garden features common areas, draws widespread support from its culturally diverse neighbourhood. For these reasons, it challenges the Park Board assumption that community gardens represent an exclusive land use. The parks deficient Mount Pleasant neighbourhood has managed to create a community garden out of a small space that welcomes local involvement, and, with its common amenities, functions like a more formal park. The fence that encloses it demonstrates the community effort that went into creating the garden. It provides recreational opportunities for non-gardeners as well as food production for the lease holders. For this reason, it alleviates many of the land use conflicts associated with designating land for individual use.

The following chapter, a community garden proposal in North Burnaby, attempts to meet similar objectives. As the proposed site has an important cycling and pedestrian trail going through it, the project will offer community greening opportunities for casual passersby. Furthermore, its tree planting and provisions for natural habitat will beautify a neglected space. This project outlines the process of implementing a community garden - getting community support, and accessing local resources. It demonstrates some of the difficulties community activists can face in getting municipal approval for a site.

Chapter 5 A COMMUNITY GARDEN IN BURNABY HEIGHTS

INTRODUCTION

I submitted a proposal for a community garden in the Burnaby Heights area to the Burnaby Planning Department in January '95. This case study gives a brief history of the planning of the garden. It then describes 2 processes in the implementation of the proposal. The first is the municipal process, beginning with the initial proposal, then the project's current planning episode. The second process is accessing local support and input. This project involves local input, two municipal offices, as well as a multi-national corporation (Chevron Canada).

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF THE AREA

Burnaby's waterfront along the Burrard Inlet is dominated by oil refineries and parks. While local residents have complained about the air pollution caused by industry, the current state of development has protected wildlife habitat. As a result, this urban area shelters deer, foxes, coyotes, raccoons, eagles, hawks, waterfowl, and amphibians. Since the seventies, the oil refineries located along the Burrard in North Burnaby have been buying up residential sites on adjacent properties for use as a buffer zone. In general, they have demolished the buildings, but left the original landscape untouched. As a result, there are about 12 abandoned fruit trees on the properties. These have not been maintained and are in need of pruning to restore full productive capacity. In particular, there is one tract of land - a full city block - that is minimally maintained by the City of Burnaby (grass mowing about two times a year). This site has a poorly

developed trail (too narrow, muddy in wet weather) which nevertheless is a crucial link in Burnaby's Urban Trails system. This site is desirable for a community garden because it is undeveloped, large, and strategically located. The size of the site allows for the provision of a number of features, including common amenities (for public use) as well as more individual allotments. The site is connected with Burnaby's Urban Trails network, and features an adjacent bus stop. For this reason, it offers several transportation choices to the users, whether by foot, bicycle, or by car.

The Chevron Refinery located within the study area has turned the ownership of this land over to the City of Burnaby. The City of Burnaby held a public meeting on August 29, 1995, for the purpose of rezoning the site to parkland. This rezoning application was successful with some opposition aimed specifically against the community garden proposal - which was not formally the topic of discussion. The opposition consisted of a few local residents whose grievances ranged from concern over increased traffic, perceived messy appearance of community gardens, to destruction of coyote habitat.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

The Burnaby Heights area is the immediate northwest corner of Burnaby. Its residential boundaries are as follows: west - Boundary road, east - Willingdon Avenue, and south - Pender St. The northern boundary is the Burrard Inlet. The residences within the area are varied, providing a vibrant social mix. Currently, the housing stock within the Burnaby Heights Area is predominantly single family dwellings. However, along the Hastings commercial area, many of the stores have apartments above them, providing affordable and convenient housing for those who live there. There are older lowrise apartment

buildings on either of the parallel side streets, providing similar accommodation. Three highrise developments were built within the last fifteen years - these were allowed under the previous 1969 comprehensive development plan for the area.

There were numerous problems with this plan, and the zoning it allowed. For this reason, the area stagnated, with derelict buildings, vacant lots, and absentee landlords. There was inadequate demand for highrise residential within the area. Furthermore, developers had difficulty acquiring tracts of land large enough to build upon. The most recent Hastings Area Plan is an extensive revision of the 1969 plan, replacing the comprehensive development focus with a strategy for incremental growth. For this reason, it encouraged small lot development, social diversity with affordable housing initiatives, and mixed use. The recommended zoning changes reduced allowable building heights to a four storey maximum, thus enabling small lot development, view retention, and preservation of the desirable heritage characteristics of the commercial area. (Burnaby Planning Department, 1991a)

This plan was approved by Burnaby City Council on June 3, 1991. (Burnaby Planning Department, 1991b) Perhaps its most visible outcome has been the rapid increase in condominium developments along either side of the Hastings St. corridor. Increasingly, a new type of homeowner, without garden space, has moved into the area. It is anticipated that these new homeowners would be well served by having a nearby community garden.

BURNABY NOW ♦ CITY ♦ SUNDAY, AUGUST 13, 1995

Heights garden idea grows

A transformation is in the works for the buffer zone around Chevron refinery

By Anne Risdon
BURNABY NOW REPORTER

When Diane Hall and Mia Peterson look at the Chevron buffer zone in Burnaby Heights they visualize fruit trees, habitat for birds, frogs, bees and butterflies - and raised garden beds for people who haven't got yards of their own.

Both women belong to the Heights Neighbourhood Association which recently asked Burnaby park commissioners to approve a community garden for the site which is on the north side of Eton Street between Rosser and Madison. All the residents across the street support the idea, Hall says.

Chevron is transferring the land to the city of Burnaby for a park. An urban trail winds through the potential garden site which occupies one full city block or about 18 lots.

"We want to have common land, picnic sites, something that would attract people to it so that the garden can also be a park."

Diane Hall
COMMUNITY
GARDEN
SUPPORTER

"We want to have common land, picnic sites, something that would attract people to it so that the garden can also be a park. It will make it a much more pleasant area to walk through," Hall says.

"We have about 13 people that really want plots. They just called out of the blue indicating they would like a garden." Once formal approval is received the Heights Neighbourhood Association will do a postal walk through the

neighbourhood to inform other potential gardeners of the opportunity.

The need for a community garden is growing in Burnaby Heights because more multiple-housing units are being built where residents have no opportunity to garden, Hall says.

Already the local branch of Vancouver City Savings has indicated its support. "Staff want to have a plot and employees would like to be volunteers, pitching in where needed."

Hall doesn't expect start-up money to be a problem. The Heights Neighbourhood Association has earmarked \$5,000 for the garden and is ready to fire off funding applications as soon as approval is given for the project. Likely sources include the environmental funds of



READY FOR A HOE-DOWN: Diane Hall and Mia Peterson stand in front of the former Chevron buffer zone that Burnaby Heights neighbours hope to turn into a community garden

PHOTO BY LARRY WRIGHT

Vancouver City Savings and Canada Trust and the federal government will match funds for suitable environmental projects.

Strathcona community garden in Vancouver with its frog pond, heritage fruit trees and common areas is the ideal model for the Heights project, says Hall, who is finishing her masters degree in Urban Planning by doing a thesis on community

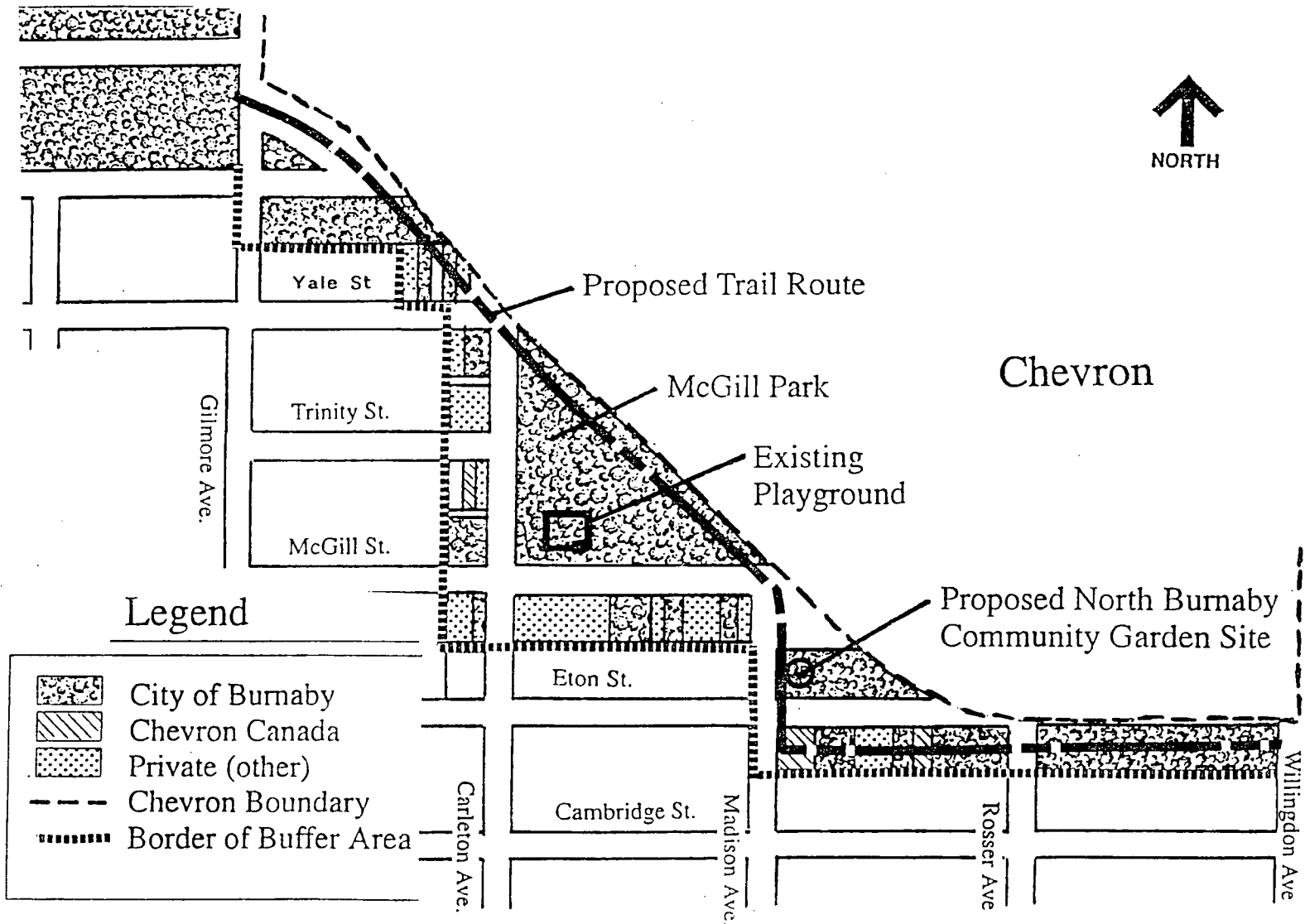
gardens.

The garden use coupled with natural habitat for birds, amphibians, bees and butterflies is very compatible with the function of the land as a buffer zone for Chevron, she says.

The parks commission referred Hall's request to Burnaby's environment and waste committee for a report.

MAP

A COMMUNITY GARDEN IN THE BURNABY HEIGHTS AREA



PHOTO



**PHOTOGRAPH OF
THE SITE SHOWING
TANKS TO THE
NORTH, MASSIVE
AREA IN NEED OF
BEAUTIFICATION,
TRAIL IN NEED OF
IMPROVEMENT**

PROBLEM DEFINITION

I am hopeful that this project becomes a case study for future consideration / policy recommendations. A variety of user needs will be met, through the implementation of a community garden within Burnaby's urban trails system, and by planting heritage fruit trees as well as developing allotment parcels. In this way, those in single family dwellings as well as those without yards may benefit from this amenity, as will the casual recreational user. Furthermore, consideration will be given to reserving space for native plants, and wildlife habitat.

MUNICIPAL PROCESS PLANNING EPISODE

The Heights Neighbourhood Association has identified a site, and drafted a wish list, earmarking \$5000.00 initial funding for the project. Local support has been sought through community meetings, newspaper articles in the local paper, and through posters placed on local bulletin boards. The Burnaby Planning Department indicates recommendation for approval.

From an environmental perspective, the inclusion on the landscape treatment of a community garden as proposed, mentioning such provisions as a bird habitat, frog pond, fruit trees and common areas, would enhance habitat and environmental attributes. At the time of site design, subject to necessary approvals, various environmental considerations should be addressed ...

A suitable development of a community garden on this site, therefore, would improve the habitat conditions while enhancing the sense of community, allowing individuals and groups the opportunity to grow food and flowers and enjoy gardening. (Stenson, 1995)

Because the site has been rezoned to parkland, the Planning Department has handed the development of the site -and the community garden proposal - over to the Parks and Recreation Commission. Concerned about the environmental impact, the Commission referred the proposal to the Waste and Environment Committee, who made the following motion:

That the Environment and Waste Management Committee advise the Parks and Recreation Commission that they support the concept of a community garden for the Burnaby Heights Neighbourhood Association and that they are willing to work with the Commission and the Heights Neighbourhood Association to identify and evaluate a number of potential sites, including the proposed Eton Street site, to determine a suitable location for a garden. (City of Burnaby, interoffice memorandum, October 18, 1995)

LEGAL OBSTACLES

The reluctance of this committee to recommend outright approval for the site in question has to do with its buffer zone designation as an adjacent property to an industrial use.

While the conditions of this designation have not previously been challenged, the general understanding is that passive use only is acceptable. Passive use for this site would mean that community greening for the purposes of an urban trail would be allowed, as the site would be used as a thoroughfare. However, having allotment parcels on the site would promote a more active use. At the August 29, 1995 meeting, a Chevron Oil Refinery representative stated that "Chevron was fundamentally opposed to the idea of a community garden on the site".

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

The Parks and Recreation Commission met on October 18, 1995, to discuss the proposal, having the reports of both the Waste and Management Committee, and the Director of

Recreation and Cultural Services Report. I attended at this meeting, in order that I might offer some input, answer questions, and give support for the project. The Commission supported the concept of a community garden on the proposed site. They expressed reluctance to use developed park sites for this purpose.

The motion is as follows:

That staff work with the Heights Neighbourhood Association to establish a community garden at the 4300 block of Eton St.

This motion was followed by a request for a legal review:

That the proposed community garden at the 4300 block of Eton St. be referred to the City Solicitor for an opinion (Item 14, Director's report #2, Commission Meeting 96/01/17).

The solicitor's report did not find evidence that a community garden would violate an agreement between Chevron and the municipality. In fact, there was no such agreement.

It states:

From my search of the files I would conclude that there was no agreement between Burnaby and Chevron on the details of how the buffer zone would be developed. The area is variously referred to as a buffer zone, a landscaped buffer and a green belt and its purpose is to separate and screen the industrial use from the residential neighbourhood (Flieger, 1996:439-440).

At the January 17, 1996 meeting, the Burnaby Parks and Recreation Commission, after a brief presentation by the same Chevron representative, concluded that the site was too close to the industrial site to be suitable for a community garden. The explanation was that the types of land use were incompatible, although there was no significant risk to public safety. The representative said he recognized the importance of landscaping the site, and that Chevron would contribute to its cost (however, the site has existed in its current state

for roughly 20 years). In response, the Commission rescinded their earlier motion, and replaced it with the following:

That staff work with the Heights Neighbourhood Association to identify and evaluate potential sites for a Community Garden in the area. (Gaunt, 1996).

While disappointing, it is obvious that the Commission does take the idea of a community garden seriously. The Association would, however, still like to have some input into the landscaping of the initial proposed site. Through tree planting, some natural habitat, and a water fountain along the urban trail, we will still be able to beautify the area, while satisfying Chevron's concerns. In fact, the one landscaped buffer area that Chevron holds as an example does feature fruit trees and a bench. The fruit trees remain as the site was formerly residential. This treatment meets several of the objectives of the Association. We are hopeful that planting additional fruit trees on the buffer zone site, along with benches and a frog pond, might satisfy all of those involved in the development of the site. Also, as there are large tracts of vacant land on the South side of Eton St., these might be found to be appropriate for allotments. If acceptable to the representatives of Chevron Canada, the landscaping on the initial site would complement the adjacent allotments.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

At present, there are only two community gardens within Burnaby: the Stoney Creek Gardens and the Burnaby Allotment Gardens. The former was implemented by local activists on land owned by the Burnaby School Board: the latter, by the provincial government in the mid-seventies. Both gardens are highly successful and have waiting

lists. As this project is clearly an unusual and unprecedented use of parkland, there is as yet no policy in place for dealing with community gardens.

For the Burnaby Parks and Recreation Commission, a significant policy question is whether it is appropriate to allow parkland to be used for community garden purposes.

Staff also suggest that, if the proposal proceeds, it be treated as a pilot project and that no other requests be considered until the Commission has had the opportunity to evaluate the experience in the Burnaby Heights Area. (Gaunt, 1995:404)

THE COMMUNITY GARDEN COMMITTEE - A FOCUS GROUP FORMAT

RATIONALE AND COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

While the initiative for proposing the community garden project has come from within the Heights Neighbourhood Association, a committee was formed of Association members and other local residents for the refinement of plans, and the implementation of the project. Given the commitment of the participants to the project, and the appropriateness of this group format, the input that this group was able to provide was developed as focus group research. Participants were recruited through Open House meetings of the Heights Neighbourhood Association, the local paper, and posters placed on community bulletin boards (the library, laundromats, and condominium common areas).

INITIAL QUESTIONS AND APPROACH

The communications plan was clearly directed towards those showing support for a community garden in the Burnaby Heights Area, with most of the respondents showing support a Spring 1995 article in the local paper. This December 1995 evening meeting was conducted in the library of Gilmore Community School - a convenient and central

location for Burnaby Heights residents. Participants were given cakes and herbal tea during the meeting, thus keeping the atmosphere informal and sociable. As the ultimate objective for the participants was to ultimately succeed in developing a community garden, the meeting was also an important source of information for them. For this purpose, slide shows of other community gardens were displayed. These gardens ranged in initial cost from high (UBC site) to low cost (Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Garden). The intent of this information was to increase their knowledge about the options available, in order that they might apply it to the planning of the Burnaby Heights garden. In addition, they were given a brief summary of the status of the current proposal. The questions involved loosely followed an agenda format and were consistent with the normal course of committee proceedings. These were:

1. **Round Table Introduction.** This session enabled participants to become acquainted with one another, and to relate their somewhat diverse experiences and interests.
2. **Wish List.** What features would you like to see in a community garden? This question enabled participants to refine the initial proposal.
3. **What experiences do you have of other community gardens and what benefits do you think they provide?** This question opened discussion about specific experiences with community gardens.
4. **Discussion of Community Garden Proposal -where it stands, what needs to be done.** This discussion was both informative, and initiated input from the participants. As virtually all of them had been previously active in community involvement, they were important resource people for discussing strategies for implementing the garden.

5. **We need to canvass local residents and politicians (brainstorming).** The previous experiences of the participants gave them insights into developing political strength for this project.
6. **Funding opportunities.** This session served both as information and brainstorming.

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

1) Round Table Introduction

Most of the eight participants in the community garden focus group were owners of single family dwellings. In addition, most of them had been or continued to be actively involved in community or union work. One representative from Vancity attended. The employees of this credit union have expressed an interest in participating in this project. For this reason, we recognized the value of having them attend. In addition, a Burnaby planner attended to give input into the municipal process involved with the process.

The failure of this project to recruit a substantial number of apartment and condominium dwellers points to the weakness of the communications plan in accessing this type of local resident. It could also be that long term residents owning their homes would feel that they have more of a stake in their communities. For this reason, they might be more inclined to participate in a project of this nature.

(A reporter of a local paper confirmed that it was indeed a problem accessing residents in higher density residences and basement suites. Also, as the majority of Association members appear to live in single family residences, the Association open house meetings would also be a poor means of accessing residents without yards. This problem needs to be addressed by emphasizing a different communications strategy aimed at getting a more

representative cross section of the local population. A door to door approach might be necessary.)

REFINING THE ORIGINAL PROPOSAL

2) Wish List. What features would you like to see in a community garden?

The participants all expressed enthusiasm for the community garden features proposed in the original proposal - allotments, frog pond, and heritage fruit trees. In addition, the group thought that researching and restoring streams in the area would be a possibility.

One member stated that because of the need to keep the area attractive, that fencing and arched entrance ways would be important structural elements on the site. Another member stressed the need to emphasize the multi-cultural nature of the Burnaby Heights neighbourhood. Towards this end, cultural references and personal expression should be encouraged. Features such as allowing statues on the site were discussed.

PERCEIVED SOCIAL BENEFITS

3) What experiences do you have of other community gardens, and what benefits do you think they provide?

Two of the participants had experience with community gardens in the United States, and felt that such an amenity would benefit the Burnaby Heights Area. The others had less direct involvement, but could see the benefits of community gardens in other areas by their casual observations of them. Some of these participants were not interested in having an allotment parcel themselves - they simply recognized the value of a community garden for its social benefits, and for the visual interest it would bring to the urban landscape. Others were interested in getting allotments, as their own yards were too shady to be productive

for vegetables. Only one of the local residents lived in an apartment, and was relying on the project being implemented to acquire his only means of garden space.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

4) Discussion of Community Garden Proposal - where it stands, what needs to be done.

We emphasized the fact that other community gardens within the Lower Mainland had substantial problems before they could be successfully implemented. This site proposal was unique in the sense that it required legal clarification to determine whether a community garden was an acceptable use of industrial buffer. We discussed what our strategy would be should a community garden be found an incompatible use, and agreed to attempt some collaboration with Chevron Canada towards mutually acceptable greening of the site. For instance, we believe that aspects of the plan - tree planting and a frog pond - would still comply with passive use, providing those passing through with visual interest, but not encouraging them to stay. We were also hopeful that more peripheral areas on the buffer lands would be considered compatible with more active use, but recognized that the success of a community garden project in the Heights Area did not depend on this particular site being approved. For this reason, the area should be investigated for the presence of other site possibilities.

5) We need to canvass local residents and politicians (brainstorming).

As the community garden was a political issue, its implementation had to be pursued accordingly - especially given that this case was to be a pilot project. For this reason, we handed out addresses of local politicians, urging participants to write them in support of

the project. We needed to demonstrate widespread support for this project - for this reason, developing a communications plan geared towards the difficult to reach - apartment and condominium dwellers. In addition, the political nature of this projects made aesthetic standards necessary to maintain. We agreed to investigate the bylaws of other community gardens for their suitability to our project. Realizing the importance of utilizing municipal resources for professional assistance, we felt we should liaise with Burnaby's Healthy Community Initiatives group as it would help us access areas of financial support.

6) Funding opportunities

We also discussed funding opportunities, recognizing that the Heights Neighbourhood Association has earmarked \$5000.00 for this project. Government and private sector funding are also possibilities. Another Burnaby community garden, Stoney Creek, received services from the City for water hookups, and was given a matching fund grant from Environment Canada. Organizations such as Vancity are appropriate sponsors for projects of this nature.

OUTCOME OF THE FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

After a brief letter and telephone campaign, representatives from Chevron Canada agreed to meet us to discuss the greening of the buffer lands. At this February 29, 1996 meeting, we found that they were adamantly opposed to a community garden on the buffer land, regardless of its distance from their industry. They did, however, state that they were in support of a community garden, and would provide sponsorship for one located outside the buffer. Two staff members from Burnaby Parks and Recreation also attended the

meeting. They presented us with two other possible sites, and we are currently considering the pros and cons of each of them. We indicated that we still wished to be involved in planning the landscape treatment given this site; however, it appears that the only input we will be allowed will be at the open forum once the initial plan is drafted. In many respects, this meeting was disappointing, although it appears to be certain that we will get a community garden.

For accessing local support, we enlisted the services of 3 BCIT students, who needed a marketing research project as a directed studies course. These students have agreed to survey public opinion about greening projects, to establish the degree of demand for a community garden, and to get the names of those local residents showing enthusiasm for the project. As a final project, the students will submit their findings in a report, and provide a data base of names.

SUMMARY

While it was anticipated that the majority of advocates for community gardens would be those without yards of their own, the participants in this project overwhelmingly did live in single family homes, and thought that the project was a good idea, having had positive previous experience with community gardens elsewhere. This project has demonstrated well the political difficulty that local groups face when attempting to implement community gardens. One major obstacle has been the length of time it takes to approve such a proposal. This proposal went in a year ago and is only receiving serious consideration now. That delay occurred in spite of a sympathetic planning department.

For local activists, long delays mean that some core members will either lose interest, leave the area, or take on other commitments.

Chapter 6 CONCLUSION

This thesis has been divided into three sections - the literature review, the case study, and the project proposal. The literature review demonstrates the value of community gardens, and places them within a theoretical framework. The case study has provided specific examples of issues brought out in the literature review. The project proposal utilizes information gathered from these principle research sources to address the original question: **How can community gardens be implemented to maximize social benefits while minimizing conflicts and overcoming obstacles?**

Community gardens are an incremental step to more sustainable communities because they promote a sense of self - reliance, harmony with neighbours and the natural environment.

When:

basic necessities are no longer produced locally, people lose an important base for understanding how their everyday lives are connected with the environment and lose respect for the systems that sustain them. (Perkins, 1996:10)

These gardens emphasize local production rather than globalized economies, and improve urban life by providing a green space that invites creative activity. They offer a reasonable and affordable alternative to a backyard garden, and facilitate a transition to higher density residences in the urban landscape - an important development towards more livable communities. The literature on the topic indicates that community gardens have multi-faceted benefits - social, economic, and environmental. They are consistent with Planning theory for sustainable communities, as they promote a sense of stewardship and environmental education. The historical examples of allotments in Europe demonstrates

their flexibility. For instance, during times of adversity, they can serve a predominantly economic function of food production. During times of prosperity, these same gardens can be used more for recreation.

The Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood Garden maximizes social benefits by intensively utilizing available space on a small site. By encouraging programming, with an educational component to the garden, the benefits of this green space serves a wide audience. This is accomplished informally, by allowing local residents to put their food scraps in the compost. It is also achieved more formally, through being incorporated into the curriculum of schools and local organizations (such as the Boy Scouts). Similarly, the inclusion of common amenities on the site with an attractive layout tends to encourage non-gardeners to use the site as a recreational opportunity, for casual strolling. Because they offer a destination for all to wander in and enjoy, the gardens can function as a more formal park. For this reason, the gardens help to overcome the obstacle of the opportunity cost of designating land for this purpose.

The community garden proposal in North Burnaby is aimed at meeting similar objectives. As the initial proposed site had an important cycling and pedestrian trail going through it, the goal of the project was to provide community greening opportunities for casual passersby, and to beautify a neglected space. This project outlines the process of implementing a community garden - getting community support, and accessing local resources. It demonstrates some of the difficulties community activists can face in getting municipal approval for a site - it is a work in progress: the final site for the project has yet to be determined. The study area is appropriate for a community garden as there are large

tracts of vacant land in the area. In addition, the changing demographics in the area will include a higher proportion of local residents without yards, who would presumably benefit from having a nearby community garden.

As a process, this project has generated some surprising findings: one of them is the degree to which those living in single family housing expressed enthusiasm for the project. In fact, they were the overwhelming majority of respondents interested in the project. However, the communication plan for accessing local residents - community association meetings and the local newspaper - may have been inadequate for reaching those living in apartments, condominiums, and basement suites. For this reason, a better means to access these residents has been implemented, through a directed studies project at BCIT.

WHAT CAN PLANNERS DO?

This case study indicates the difficulty that local activists face in getting started. The time delays from the initial proposal, to actually cutting the turf, make it difficult for volunteers to keep up their momentum. Short term residents will have little incentive to devote themselves to such a project: for this reason, relying on volunteer spirit alone may make the implementation of community gardens unlikely. For this reason, and because community gardens are a desirable public amenity, the role of planners in providing community gardens is important, although they can assume varying degrees of advocacy. The following section discusses how planners can get involved.

1) **A relatively passive approach.** In this approach, the project originates out of community initiative, assisted by the planner. In the Burnaby Heights example, the planner was a resource person, attending meetings, and liaising between the community group and

Burnaby City Hall. For this purpose, the planner acted as a facilitator. This role is effective, provided local residents request to have a nearby community garden. This joint consultation process would likely have the most satisfactory results, in terms of location, local involvement, and cost effectiveness.

I) To work well within this role, planners could begin by getting acquainted with local activists, attending their meetings, listening to their concerns, and giving input into the municipal process. Building a relationship in this manner, the planner can help community groups realize what is possible, and what resources are available to them.

ii) Planners can provide insights into what other communities are doing. This information will help to give activists ideas about projects in their own communities.

2) A more active approach. If the planner only facilitates, there are likely areas without active local residents that would not be provided with community gardens. Developing areas, and those with high levels of transiency would be less likely to have a pro-active neighbourhood association. In these cases, planners would have to advocate more forcefully to have community gardens successfully implemented.

The Burnaby and Regional Allotment Garden Association (BARAGA) provides a good example of a garden that was implemented by a government agency, but then turned over to a non-profit society for a more cost effective administration. This association, in an effort to improve the appearance of the site, drafted additional bylaws to include flower borders on individual plots, and site maintenance. (Burnaby and Regional Allotment Gardens Association, 1993). This example demonstrates that community gardens can be

implemented even with passive residents: however, once the gardens are established, local residents can reasonably be expected to participate more fully.

iii) Developing areas could commence community gardens through zoning available space, a strategy that could work especially well with higher density residential construction, as the presence of the garden would alleviate the need for a yard. Zoning before available green space is fully allocated would prevent land use conflicts from arising - an issue that would likely develop if community gardens were developed later.

iv) Concession demands could be made of developers to provide community gardens on public space in return for higher density development. This degree of capital funding could ensure elements such as arbors and archways were constructed on the site, thus improving its attractiveness.

v) Design guidelines on private construction to encourage productive garden space instead of more conventional passive landscaping would provide residents with growing space. There is no reason why community gardens should exist solely on public land.

SUMMARY

Community Gardens are an intensive use of recreational land, inviting creative activity in the manipulation of the landscape. While individually leased parcels invite private stewardship, connecting pathways and common amenities encourage public use and enjoyment (albeit more passively). It is these common features that typify the more successful community gardens in the Lower Mainland. The Strathcona Community Garden and the Mount Pleasant Garden are two highly successful examples. More generally the benefits of community or allotment gardens are long term, and adaptable to

changing circumstances. Because they restore a public realm to urban existence, community gardens are elements for consideration in planning for sustainable communities.

Because of their social benefits, it is appropriate for planners to have a role in the implementation of community gardens. A relatively passive approach would be that of facilitator, whereby the project is initiated within the local community. In this case, the planner would assist community members to make sure their projects are approved by municipal councils. A more active approach could involve the planner initiating the project. The possible means for implementation could be through zoning changes, or by negotiating with developers for the provision of community gardens.

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