

Proposal: Community Garden by the Neighborhood Energy Utility (NEU)

Creek Community Gardeners (CCG)

Since November 2009 several local residents, who were interested in establishing a community garden, met regularly and formed the Creek Community Gardeners in early March 2010. The mission of the group is to contribute to a sense of community, healthy eating and active living by creating and operating community gardens in the False Creek/Fairview neighborhood.

The group gained a sense of initial interest of gardening by way of sign-up sheets in a few buildings in the neighborhood. We have 49 people on our 'wait-list'. The False Creek South Neighborhood Association also confirmed that gardens are highly desirable for this neighborhood in a survey done in January 2009. We are also aware that the City of Vancouver holds a wait-list of potential gardeners in the area.

The closest community garden to this neighborhood is located at Vancouver City Hall, which currently has a wait-list of 60 individuals (approximately a 4-5 year wait).

The CCG have forwarded a proposal for a garden on Leg-in-Boot Square to the City of Vancouver. In June, Erin Mac Donald, Green Street coordinator met up with Yolanda Bienz from the CCG and expressed that the Real Estate Department of the City of Vancouver is supportive of the Leg-in-Boot Square proposal but thinks that the community consultation will encounter a lot of work and difficulties.

She also mentioned that there is a possibility for the CCG to gain experience on getting a garden started on a different site in the neighborhood. The City of Vancouver and the Neighborhood Energy Utility center would like to see a community garden on the land beside NEU and asked if our group would like to pursue it.

NEU community garden location

This location will bring an established community on the west side of Cambie Bridge together with the brand new neighborhoods evolving on the east. The garden will act as a connector and will reduce the impact of Cambie Bridge which feels like a divider between east and west.

A community garden will enhance the sustainability values of the Neighborhood Energy Utility center. NEU creates energy from sewer heat. NEU and its future community garden are leading away from the fossil fuel dependency towards sustainability. Growing local and organic vegetables greatly reduces demand on oil based fertilizer, packaging, machinery, transportation, etc.

The garden will be located on a bicycle route, close to the Olympic Village Metro Station and future streetcar network.

All these elements share the direction with Vancouver the Greenest City.

Design elements

The community garden would consist of about 38 individual or group ground-level plots (approx. 9 rows by 4'x36') and eight raised wood planters for elders and/or disabled gardeners (approx. 2' high). A plot would be on average 4 feet by 9 feet.

2 plots will be designated to a child care centre, charity or a local non-profit organization for their free use.

A communal herb garden is also part of the plan.

The beds will be contained with wood perimeters, which will eliminate the need to control plants from spreading onto adjacent paths and will also keep soil within the growing areas.

The surface of pathways and the play area will be wood chips, which will require little if any maintenance.

The garden will be surrounded on the west side by the existing rock blocks and on the east side by an existing fence. Gardeners who will have a plot adjacent to the fence will be encouraged to grow beans on the fence to create a green element on the east side. A contemporary wooden fence in keeping with the style of the NEU building would be built on the south side to define the space towards Commodore Road/1st Avenue. The fence and some native plants will create a nice streetscape on the south side of the garden.

Existing features, such as the benches on the north side as well as the rocks will give the gardeners and other visitors the opportunity to relax and enjoy the garden.

A locked wooden tool box would be located on site and would contain all tools needed by gardeners to maintain their plots.

Compost facilities will be placed on the south side of the garden. The CCG will build 50% of the anticipated space required the first year. The remainder will be built as necessary. A properly built and managed composter has little if any odor nor does it attract rodents, but creates soil rich in nutrition ideal for growing vegetables

Rain barrels could reduce the need of municipal water. 44” of rain falls during a typical year in Vancouver. This is a healthy water source for plants.

All utility covers remain accessible. Entrance configuration will be determined in discussion with NEU/BC Hydro and Telus.

The site already features night lighting and a bicycle rack.

Building

With sponsorship from False Creek South Neighborhood Association (FCSNA) the CCG will build and manage the community garden. The CCG would like to see the garden built by December 1st 2010 to do mulching and winter gardening. The CCG have skills in house design, building, volunteer work and/or friends with skills to build a garden. We are also aware that there are groups in Vancouver who support groups like us to help build community gardens and community engagement (e.g., Evergreen, Project in place society, Vancouver Public Space Network, Moby). Hilary Davis and Allison Houser from Evergreen have helped us from early on.

CCG and False Creek South Neighborhood Association (FCSNA)

The FCSNA is an established organization. Its members meet monthly to discuss issues of concern to residents on the south side of the creek. The FCSNA encourages residents to be actively involved in proposed changes in the neighborhood. THE FCSNA would like to see community gardens on the south side of False Creek and is glad to see that a group of local residents are working on it.

Former MP and current FCSNA member Margaret Mitchell who lives in the neighborhood has expressed her support for our initiative and has helped us make connection with other interested parties.

The CCG has partnered up with FCSNA which will sponsor the group and will hold the liability insurance. Attached is an agreement letter between the two groups as well as proof that FCSNA is a registered non-profit organization.

Global work party

On October 10th 2010 people around the world will celebrate climate solutions at the local level. The CCG would like to participate in this worldwide event by having the first workday on site.

Membership responsibilities

Community gardeners will be required to sign a contract which will ensure that the plots are well-tended and maintained (see sample contract). The community gardens will be aesthetically pleasing during all seasons. Spring planting must be done by mid May. Gardeners will be required to clean-up and mulch their plot, plant a cover crop (e.g., field peas, winter rye, etc) and/or plant winter vegetables (e.g., kale, brussel sprouts) by November 1st of each year. As identified in the contract, the garden would host work parties that community gardeners would be required to attend. The work parties will on maintaining the garden's communal spaces and building community.

Community consultation

Through posters at local residences and businesses, the Creek Community Gardeners have invited interested parties to attend our meetings to learn more about this initiative and to provide input into the planning process. Everyone is welcome to join.

A 2 block radius community consultation is planned for September, after the school holidays.

Financial Sustainability Plan

The Creek Community Gardeners will be responsible for raising money to cover the costs of building the plots, their on-going maintenance and eventual replacement. The group will raise money through local donations and annual plot fees. A fundraiser event will be held in early October (after final approval from the City of Vancouver). Tentatively a loan will be given to the group to cover the building costs. This loan will be paid back over the next two years through annual plot fees at which time a small cash balance is anticipated. After five years we expect to have enough cash to rebuild the garden components as necessary. Attached you will find a preliminary budget.

The Creek Community Gardeners would ask for support from the City of Vancouver in ensuring access to water, clearing the lawn and providing adequate soil.

Great opportunity

A community garden at the Neighborhood Energy Utility site creates an opportunity for residents in South False Creek/Fairview to take the lead in growing their own food and decreasing their carbon footprints. Community gardening is a great way to build a sense of community, local spirit and pride. It encourages teamwork and cooperation, provides a healthy means of getting exercise while meeting neighbors. When an individual participates in caring for the soil, tending plants, harvesting crops and cooking them, the necessity of a connection between sustaining ourselves and caring for the earth is undeniable.

We are very excited and looking forward to building and managing the community garden at NEU.

Thank you for your consideration of our proposal.

The Creek Community Gardeners
Vancouver, July 14th 2010