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**About these guidelines**

In forming these guidelines, we have drawn inspiration from a number of other local government policies and guidelines. We would like to thank the following organisations for granting us permission to use their material in these guidelines:

* + - * City of Melbourne
			* City of Bayside
			* City of Moreland
			* City of Sydney
			* City of Ballarat.

In places where these guidelines are very similar to the source material, we have identified this in the text. We have also included a list of hyperlinked references on page 13.

# Introduction

We value community gardens as they allow the community to not only come together and produce food but learn practical skills that support sustainability and healthy living.

**Key elements for a successful community garden**

1. **People** – your group will need people with a range of skills in gardening, administration and communication. You will need the support of neighbours and the local community to ensure success and minimise vandalism.
2. **Site** –your site will need to be agreed to by the City. The site will need to be large enough for garden beds, composting systems, and a tool shed. It should have good sunlight, available water, on street parking and easy access for pedestrians and deliveries.
3. **Style –** the size of the site will determine the style of garden. We encourage groups to have a shared garden to allow more people to participate.
4. **Structure** – a sound management plan will provide structure for all group members by outlining responsibilities, rosters, maintenance and record keeping.
5. **Promotion** – promoting your garden through open days or social media will encourage more people to get involved and support your garden

Source: City of Sydney Community Gardens Policy 2016

The purpose of these guidelines is to outline the process we use to help community gardening groups not only find an appropriate site, but also make sure they’ve got the right elements in place to succeed (see box inset).

## What is a community garden?

Community gardens are areas of land gardened collectively by a group of people. According to Sustainability Victoria, there are two types of community gardens[[1]](#footnote-1):

1. **Shared gardens** – areas where gardeners share responsibility for the entire garden, working together to care for the plants and sharing in the produce.
2. **Allotment gardens** – where gardeners maintain their own plot and use it as they wish.

## Objectives of these guidelines

* Provide a clear process for residents who want to establish a community garden on City of Greater Geelong owned and/or managed land.
* Provide appropriate opportunities for community gardens, in response to community need and the availability of suitable land, where possible.
* Clarify the rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in community gardens.
* Promote knowledge and access to fresh, organic and locally produced fruit and vegetables.

## Scope of guidelines

These guidelines apply only to community gardens that operate on land owned and/or managed by the City. They do not apply to:

* community gardens on privately-owned land
* nature strips.

Planting and landscaping of nature strips is currently prohibited, and penalties may apply. However, this is currently under review.

## Strategic context

These guidelines are designed to ‘encourage and support local, sustainable food production’, in line with the objectives identified in our [*Sustainability Framework 2020*](https://geelongaustralia.com.au/sustainability/documents/item/8d7bc2a4bd8bbf5.aspx).

Our other policies and strategies include:

* Our Community Plan 2021–25
* [*Environment Strategy 2020–30*](https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/Environment%20Strategy%200020-2030.aspx)
* [*Social Infrastructure Plan – Generation One 2020–2023*](https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/sip/documents/item/.asp)
* [Approval procedure for Open Space Development Projects Council Policy](https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/council/reports/documents/item/8d6170b7378a7f9.aspx)

# Roles and responsibilities

We adopt a community development approach to community gardens, enabling gardening groups to manage gardens themselves with support and guidance from our team.

The following clarifies the different roles and responsibilities of the City and the community garden group.

## Our responsibilities

In establishing a community garden, we will:

* make the final decision on the appropriateness and suitability of any final location for a community garden
* provide information to link residents with existing community gardens
* consider and assess requests from new and emerging community garden groups to establish a community garden, in line with the site assessment criteria and community garden application process
* work with the community group to ensure the site and garden is suitable for growing food for human consumption
* assess written planning advice applications, where required, and provide written confirmation in a timely manner
* negotiate licences with the community garden group for use of the land, in line with established lease and licence principles and practices
* engage with neighbours and the broader community to determine local support for a proposed garden in a specific location.

We do not:

* oversee or establish community garden groups
* identify potential sites for a community garden. although we can make, some suggestions of sites and will make the final decision on the most appropriate site.
* build and/or maintain community gardens.

## Community garden group responsibilities

In establishing a community garden, your group must:

* establish a group with members willing to contribute to the development of the garden (see next section)
* be incorporated, or operating under an auspice
* be operating under public liability insurance (minimum $20 million)
* engage with the City in a process to find an appropriate site for the community garden, although our team can assist in suggesting possible sites and determining the sites that are most appropriate.
* have the resources, planning and frameworks needed to manage the garden in the long term (see Operational Plan on page 4)
* acknowledge that the proposed use of any open space as a community garden will not disadvantage other users of the space
* make the garden open to the general community and allow the community to participate in the garden.
* apply for funding for buildings and other materials needed to establish the garden.
* cover the cost of soil testing on potential sites.
* complete an application form(s) that will be considered by our team.
* apply for planning permits, where required.

# Process for establishing a garden

The following flowchart shows the process that a community garden group will follow – from the initiation of the group through to the establishment and ongoing management of the garden.

The timeframe to establish a community garden can vary significantly, but it will likely take a minimum of 12 months to plan and gain the necessary approvals. In some cases, we may not be able to find an appropriate site for your group at all. It’s important that all group members are aware of this before you begin.

**Application not supported**

Written feedback provided and alternative sites considered.

# Start a community garden group

Given the time and effort required to start a new group, you may want to consider [joining an existing group](https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/naturevolunteers/task/item/8d7f275f814b355.aspx) first.

You can find a list of community gardens by visiting our website and searching our Community Directory at:

www.geelongaustralia.com.au/directory

If there are no gardens available in your area, the next step is to find a group of like-minded people willing to join your group and support your cause. You might find these people through your existing networks, or by putting the word out via social media.

Once you have enough people interested, hold a meeting and prepare answers to the following questions:

* What do we want to achieve by setting up a new community garden?
* Do we have enough people to take on all the tasks involved in running a community garden?
* Is everyone prepared to commit to the garden in the long term?
* How can the group support broader community involvement in the garden?
* Is the group prepared to do the various administrative tasks associated with establishing a new group, such as incorporating and applying for public liability insurance?

Once you feel confident that you can satisfactorily answer these questions, it’s time to contact our team.

For more information about becoming incorporated, visit the [Consumer Affairs Victoria website](https://www.consumer.vic.gov.au/clubs-and-fundraising/incorporated-associations).

## Contact our team

Our Community and Recreation team will discuss your ideas and guide you through the process to establish a viable and successful community garden.

As well as discussing potential sites, they’ll ask you questions about your group and be able to offer advice and assistance to assist with the next stages.

P: 5272 5272

E: comrec@geelongcity.vic.gov.au

# Identify a potential site for the garden

One of the key needs of a community garden is physical space for growing plants and food.

Although the final decision on the appropriateness and suitability of any final location for a community garden rests with the City, it is the responsibility of the community garden group to identify a site, although our team can offer suggestions.

Each site should be assessed according to the following criteria. The criteria are designed to not only make sure the site will fulfill the needs of the group, but also the broader community.

While it may not always be possible to find a site that meets all of the following criteria, we will prioritise applications for sites that meet as many of the criteria as possible.

### Location

Sites classified as community land under the *Local Government Act 2020* may be appropriate. These sites are usually established for community use and include open space and community centres with outside areas.

Priority will be given to sites that do not conflict with council requirement to provide appropriate open space for general public use, or don’t conflict with other existing or potential priorities for any site. Sites that are co-located near community centres or community organisations that might be able to support or partner on the project.

### Safety

Sites should have no major safety or health concerns and should have good passive surveillance – that is, they can be easily seen by passing traffic, pedestrians, nearby houses or shopping areas.

### Accessibility

Sites should be accessible for a range of user groups, including groups wanting to visit the garden. They should be located close to public transport (where possible), support access for all abilities and offer suitable vehicle access for delivery of mulch and soil.

### Solar access

Sites need to be suitable for growing vegetables and receive full sunlight – ideally, for at least six hours per day.

### Size

Sites should be large enough to accommodate garden beds, composting systems, rainwater tanks, seating areas, shelter for gardeners, and community workshops and demonstrations.

### Water

Sites must have easy access to water or buildings nearby from which rainwater can be collected.

### Soil contamination

Sites may need to be checked for soil contamination at the expense of the community group. If high levels are present, then expert advice will be needed on whether it is suitable for growing food.

### Multiple use

Sites that allow a community garden to be integrated without conflicting with other land uses will be preferred. The site should also support use by non-members for passive recreation and educational workshops.

### Existing features

Sites where existing buildings, facilities and vegetation may be utilised or retained in the gardens will be favoured – in particular, those with access to public toilets and meeting spaces.

### Land suitability

The topography of the land should be flat without the requirement of cut or fill to develop the garden. Soil quality and drainage is also another consideration.

### Local support

The use of the proposed site for a community garden must be supported by both neighbours, as well as people in the broader community (see ‘Community Engagement’ on page 9).

### Land use planning

Use of the site for a community garden must align with existing master plans and all other planning, regulatory and legislative requirements and be compatible with surrounding land uses. Some locations may require application for a planning permit

### Consistency with strategic context

The site and proposed operations must not compromise our key strategies that relate to public open space – for example, those listed under ‘Strategic Context’ on page 3.

Based on: [*A guide to community gardens 2014*](https://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-04/Community%20Gardens%20Guide.pdf), City of Ballarat

# Develop operational plan

Establishing and maintaining a community garden requires substantial community involvement and commitment.

To improve your group’s chances of success, you’ll be required to develop an operational plan demonstrating how you intend to use the site and support involvement from the broader community.

An operational plan should contain the following points:

### Overview

This is a description of who you are, what you want to achieve and how you plan to get there.

### Statement of purpose

**T**his is your mission statement and vision for the community garden.

### Community involvement

This is a brief statement of who will be involved in the garden and should include members, stakeholders, community groups, the general public, schools and so on.

**Note:** The garden must be open to the general community and allow the community to participate in the garden. You should use this section to describe how your group will support this involvement.

### Key points/opportunities

This sets out the guiding principles of your community garden – for example, organic, artistic, open to all, an education resource for children and so on.

### Garden management

Having clear guidelines and policies, capable administrative processes and effective management systems that articulate member roles and responsibilities.

### Garden operation and design

How the site will be used and maintained – for example:

* garden bed construction and materials, elevations and colours of sheds and other buildings
* practical considerations such as accessibility and access for deliveries
* how you’ll manage inputs and outputs, such as water and waste.

### Budget

Where will the money come from and how you are going to ensure the ongoing viability of the garden. This may include grant applications, donations, membership monies, marketing ideas and so on.

This plan will also be used to explain to the broader community your intentions for the proposed site and how it will be managed.

# Engage with the community

With the operational plan in place, it is time to share your idea with the community.

While we will lead the community engagement process, we will require support from your group to promote the engagement in the broader community.

The purpose of the engagement will be to determine the support for a community garden at the proposed site, as well as identify any objections.

The community engagement will be conducted according to our [Engagement Policy](https://geelongaustralia.com.au/governance/documents/item/654812cd.aspx) and will involve engagement with neighbouring and adjacent properties, as well as the broader community. How the engagement is structured will depend on whether the proposed community garden location is identified as non-primary recreation space, or primary recreation space (including parks and sporting reserves).

Once the engagement closes, we will review the outcomes and discuss any concerns or objections raised with your group with the aim of addressing them in the operational plan. The engagement findings will also be shared with the general public.

If the outcomes of the engagement indicate majority support for the proposal, you will be invited to submit a formal application.

# The application process

All the paperwork is in order and the community engagement process is complete.

All the material you’ve collected so far is needed for the next stage – the online application process.

As well as completing an application form, you will be asked to attach all the relevant documents to your application, including:

* proof of incorporation
* a certificate of currency for public liability insurance ($20 million) and
* your draft operational plan and garden design.

### Pre-application community garden

Please complete the online community garden Pre-application form. Once your pre-application has been assessed, a staff member from the Community & Recreation team will contact you to discuss the outcome and how to proceed.

[Community gardens pre-application form](https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/ct/forms/form.aspx?form_id=20532)

### Application to establish a community garden

Please complete the online application to establish a community garden on Council owned or managed land, this form can **only** be completed and submitted when your pre-application has been assessed and you have been advised to proceed.

[Community gardens establishment application](https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/ct/forms/form.aspx?form_id=20533)

### Site selection criteria

When reviewing your application, we apply a site selection criterion which considers location, land characteristics, safety, accessibility, size, utilities, soil quality, fencing, multiple use, impacts on existing users and protecting recreational opportunities (see pages 14-16)

### Reviewing the application

Your application will be forwarded to our Assessment Panel.

The panel will consider the following elements of the application:

* the existence of available land in the area near the site
* the structure of the community garden group as it applies to incorporation and public liability insurance
* how well the chosen site fits the site selection criteria (see page 11)
* the operational plan, garden design and plans for community involvement in the garden (see page 8)
* the outcomes of the community engagement process (see page 10)
* alignment with existing master plans and all other planning, regulatory and legislative requirements
* usability of the site
* compatibility with surrounding land uses
* whether existing open space users will be disadvantaged as a result of the establishment of a community garden.

### If the application is not supported

Our team will provide written feedback to the applying group and we will work with the applicant to try and find an alternative site, where possible.

### If the application is approved

If the application is approved, the garden will move into the establishment phase (see page 12).

# Establish the community garden

The site has been approved, but there’s still a few things to get in order before it’s time to start planting.

### Licence agreement

A licence agreement will be drawn up between the City and the community garden group for an initial period of 12 months.

Once this has been signed the group can apply for grants to fund the construction of the garden.

### Applying for funding

It is the group’s responsibility to find funding for any construction costs or other expenses involved in running the garden.

### Planning applications

If planning approval is required to build on the site, the group will be required to complete a planning application.

### Site induction

We will organise a site meeting with the group to discuss reporting, monitoring, maintenance and safety for the site.

### Garden establishment

The group will need to organise a working bee to plant crops and discuss maintenance of the garden.

We will also work with the community garden group to plan for an official opening.

# References and Appendices

City of Bayside (2015) [Community Garden Policy](https://www.bayside.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/bayside_community_garden_policy_adopted_2_september_2013.pdf)

City of Ballarat (2015) [*A guide to community gardens 2015*](https://www.ballarat.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-04/Community%20Gardens%20Guide.pdf)

City of Kingston (2020) [*Community Garden Policy*](https://www.kingston.vic.gov.au/Community/Sustainability-and-Workshops/Community-Gardens)

City of Melbourne [*Community Garden Policy*](https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/residents/home-neighbourhood/gardens-and-green-spaces/Pages/community-garden-policy-and-guide.aspx)

City of Moreland (2018) [*Community Food Growing Assessment Guidelines*](https://www.moreland.vic.gov.au/globalassets/areas/social-policy/communityfoodgrowingassessmentguidelinesfinal_web-january-2019.pdf)

City of Sydney (2016) [Community Gardens Policy and *Community Gardens Guidelines*](https://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/policies/community-gardens-policy)

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| Site selection criteria | Considerations |
| 1 | **LOCATION** |  |
| 1.1 | Sites must be located in the area where the community garden group has demonstrated interest and commitment. | Site to be within relevant *Social Infrastructure Plan 2020* (SIP) Planning Area or suburbs nominated by the group.Check if the group has identified a particular preferred site on City-owned land – full assessment of relevant area is still to be completed as group’s preferred site may not be the most suitable.Group to confirm if any sites on land not owned/managed by the City have been considered.  |
| 1.2 | Potential sites will be considered in the following order |
|  | 1. A site should be sought within the grounds of, or adjacent to, an existing community facility (such as school, church or other non-profit organisation).
 | Existing community facilities can be ideal sites for community gardens because they may already have infrastructure such as toilets, shelter and storage areas. Resident organisations may also be able to provide other forms of support, such as administrative or financial assistance. |
| 1. City-owned land that is surplus to requirements.
 | City-owned vacant land parcels or disused facilities that are not part of the open space network, or in an area with a under supply of public open space. Must consult with Property Department and the relevant City department responsible for asset planning based on the land’s previous or intended use |
| 1. City of Greater Geelong facilities with adequate unused or underutilised land of an appropriate size.
 | Available space might be limited so discuss with Community Infrastructure Planning. Check future plans for land that would limit licence/lease term |
| 1. Locations classified as non-primary recreation open space, provided a community garden would not compromise the primary function of that land.
 | Seek advice from relevant departments, depending on type of primary function, to determine suitability. The percentage of the site that can be occupied will be determined by its primary function, any existing plans for future uses or changes to the layout, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and potential impact on community, such as active travel routes. |
| 1. Locations classified as primary recreation open space (including parks and sporting reserves) may only be considered if there is no other land available and suitable.

Sites in Planning Areas with inadequate primary recreation provision are less likely to be supported.**NOTE:** Only underutilised portions of primary recreation open space be considered. Areas that may appear as underutilised can have a function such as run-offs, buffers, access and so on. In some instances, there may be sites earmarked for future recreation uses that may be suitable for community gardens as an interim use. These will be subject to licence terms that reflect the temporary use and will not guarantee an alternate site will be available at the end of the lease/licence period.  | Assess the open space network within the planning area. Confirm if there is adequate primary recreation open space. For use of community open space, such as parks, a maximum percentage of any site may be able to be occupied by community gardens depending on the design, current use and need for future flexibility to meet open space design requirements. .5ha or less cannot take up more than 15%Greater than .5 up to 1ha – up to 20%More than 1ha – up to 25% ANDMust leave at least half or minimum 2500m2 of unstructured open space for general use/kick aboutANDMust leave at least 1/3 for structured play/social spaces etcANDCannot obstruct function/access/surveillanceANDCannot fragment other uses.If sporting reserve, percentage of site able to be occupied to be determined based on layout/CPTED/potential impact on primary uses (e.g. sport, active travel routes) |
| 1.3 | Must ensure adequate space, regardless of land type, to allow for demand and expected infrastructure requirements associated with a community garden. * Sites should not compromise public accessibility and any of the current or planned functional requirements of open space land.
* Sites should not have a significant detrimental impact on neighbouring land uses or nearby properties.
* Sites located in higher density residential areas are preferred if there is sufficient demonstrated need and the site is both suitable and available.
 | Recommend minimum 1000m2 for a community garden. Applicant group to confirm proposed model, initial anticipated membership demand.Areas that would be fenced to restrict public access to be identified and reviewed.Consider neighbouring land uses and zoning. Impacts on neighbours will also be part of community consultation. Residential density/average lot sizes in the area to be considered when assessing likely demand. Community gardens will only be considered in urban and suburban areas. Not appropriate in low density/rural areas of the municipality.Area to be allocated to a community garden may be varied if the outcome of the community engagement demonstrates higher or lower demand than expected.  |
| 2 | **LAND CHARACTERISTICS** |  |
| 2.1 | Site should be suitable for use as a community garden with a primary aim of growing edible produce.The requirements may vary slightly depending on the proposed garden model and expectations nominated by the Community Garden Group. | Sites should receive full sunlight, ideally for at least 5–6 hours per day, and should have a predominantly northern orientation.Sites should have adequate drainage. Flood zones may be acceptable depending on proposed model and design. Advice will be sought from relevant City departments.Topography should be suitable for the layout of a garden without the need for cut or fill.Sites to be able to achieve compliance with Australian Standard AS1428 suite to ensure all abilities access.Consideration to be given to what existing infrastructure is available at proposed sites – for example, toilets and shelter. |
| 2.2 | Consideration should be given to: * the environmental values of the site including any existing trees or other vegetation.
* the heritage values of the site
* encumbrances – what type, percentage of the site that is encumbered, limitations/restrictions and reasonable work arounds
 | Check all easements, overlays and so on for example: native vegetation, trees (including Tree Protection Zones), heritage, utilities and so on.Sites where the garden beds can avoid tree protection zones for existing trees are preferred. ‘Reasonable’ encumbrances to work around include, but are not limited to: * Utility easements\*
* 1% AEP flood zones^
* Overhead powerlines

\*Access requirements of a utility authority (that may result in a loss of crop/site access for a season) to be considered and limitations on works within an easement to be determined. ^ Sites within a 1:100-year flood zone are acceptable due to low frequency of impacts. However, must discuss any proposal with the Engineering Department. Seek advice from relevant units as required. |
| 3 | **SAFETY** | **CONSIDERATIONS** |
| 3.1 | Sites should have no major safety or health concerns.Sites should preferably have good natural surveillance from nearby residences, businesses or passing traffic, cyclists and pedestrians. | Refer to the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles for further information on natural surveillance. This includes ensuring good sight lines to and from the community garden site. |

1. Sustainability Victoria (2021) [*Using a community garden.*](https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/recycling-and-reducing-waste/at-home/avoid-waste/grow-your-own-food/community-gardens) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)