

Community Garden Network Project

2010

Goal: To create a public system of Community (allotment) Gardens serving the Greater Vernon area.

Vision: The Community Garden Network would include a number and variety of community allotment gardens that are open and available to any and all members of the public in a number of accessible and desirable locations. Members of the community who want or need to grow their own food will be supported through the provision of land, skill development, and policy that will ensure community food production capacity remain a public asset.

Background: The need for community gardens was identified in a Food Security Assessment and Action Plan (SPCNO – North Okanagan Food Action Coalition, 2007). An opportunity to pilot a community garden in partnership with Greater Vernon Services was pursued by a community group in 2008, resulting in the first garden in East Hill. The success of this pilot allowed project funding to develop a Community Garden Inventory and Community Garden Network model proposed for future garden development (SPCNO – 2009). During this time, the new Food Action Society of the North Okanagan determined their support for a Community Garden Network as part of their Urban Agriculture Initiative (see www.foodaction.ca). The Food Action Society of the North Okanagan, with the help of a community grant from the City of Vernon, and building on the previous projects, was able to hire a one-time project coordinator to set the model in motion (2009-2010).

Community Garden Network (Model): The proposed model for the Community Garden Network development is based on community/public partnerships.

Garden Committees: Before any garden can be considered for development, a garden committee must demonstrate commitment to the design, development and operation of the site through an application process. They would be responsible for the day to day operations and any fundraising over and above the *\$2500 start-up grant. Upon registration, each community gardener pays a fee, signs an agreement outlining the conditions of use, and commits volunteer time to the maintenance of the garden.

As part of the project, Greater Vernon Services Parks, Recreation and Culture was encouraged to develop policy around community gardens that would outline their role and support. Community Gardens are recognized as important components of a community food system that enable greater food security, recreation, and social interaction.

A policy was recently presented and approved by the Regional District of the North Okanagan (Feb 2010). It states that support for community gardens would include:

- Tenure on public land where a community garden has community support and has been approved by the Regional District
- Registration and fee collection through the Greater Vernon Recreation Centre
- Water utility for gardens on public land where access already exists
- Assistance with promotion and meeting space
- Provision of signage and portable toilets if requested
- Administration to negotiate leases on privately owned lands should they be required and a charitable receipt issuance to land donors
- *A one time startup grant for new gardens up to \$2500

At the completion of the project, a clear process will be established for new garden development, and it is expected that under the current model, that gardens once developed, will be sustained by the garden committees with the help of the support structures in place. The supports documents will be able to be accessed at www.greatervernonrecreation.ca under the Community Garden tab.

Community Gardens in the Greater Vernon Area: To date, three community gardens operate in the Vernon area:

East Hill Community Garden: This is the pilot garden on private land located at 900 Shantz Road. There are approximately 40 traditional garden allotments available in 3 sizes. The garden is entering its 3rd year of operation and has proven to be popular with gardeners of all types. It is just outside the City in the BX (area C) on 4 lovely acres, surrounded by farmland. It is anticipated that a renewal of the lease will result in another 3 years of operation (2011-2013).



Pleasant Valley (Square Foot) Community Garden: This garden, located at the Pleasant Valley Church of God (1 km north of Butcher Boys at 6161 Pleasant Valley Road), started up in 2009 when the church offered extra land to the community for a garden. Modeled after the renowned Square Foot Garden method of Mel Barthomew, it consists of 64 (4x4x1') beds, and was funded and built with the support of local Rotary Clubs. This year, the garden will receive the support of the network and gardeners can register at the Recreation Centre as per the East Hill Garden. It is hoped that it will become fully allocated this year.



West Vernon Community Garden: New for 2010, the West Vernon Community Garden is located downtown near the Schubert Centre on the grounds of the former West Vernon Elementary School. While the school district awaits permission to sell the site, an agreement was struck between Greater Vernon Services and the School District to allow the construction of a community garden on a portion of the property. The West Vernon garden consists of 50 (4'x8') raised boxed beds and has proven to be popular with seniors and apartment dwellers who reside in the area.



How does a person get an allotment at a Community Garden? Registration for new gardeners begins late winter/early spring at the Recreation Centre in Vernon (check the www.greatervernonrecreation.ca and/or Leisure Guide for dates). There you will pay your allotment fee and sign the gardener agreement and use permit. Due to the popularity of the community gardens, there are usually limited spaces available. An allotment is available on a first come first served basis. Registration for the season usually closes in March, however, sometimes allotments become available and late registration is possible.

If you would like more information about the Community Garden Network project or any of the gardens contact Wendy Aasen at 250-542-6920 or email wendyaasen@shaw.ca