



LUSH VALLEY

Share the Harvest Community Garden

Vision and Plan

2024





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1. **Introduction, Garden History and Context**

The Share the Harvest Community Garden is a grass-roots community-driven initiative that relies on the support and participation of numerous community groups, individuals and the City of Courtenay. The garden is located at 6th Street and Harmston Avenue in downtown Courtenay, on the ‘old Courtenay School’ site. Prior to the garden, the site was largely a vacant lot of tall grasses. The City of Courtenay’s carpentry shop and some RCMP storage are located on the site, but do not use the grass field.

Since its inception in 2012 the garden has seen steady growth and community participation. ***Initiatives that will help to grow the project and ensure its success are included in this plan.*** In addition to this plan, a lease agreement is in place between LUSH Valley¹ and the City of Courtenay which governs the use of the City-owned property as a community garden. The current lease is in effect until March 2024. We are currently requesting a renewal to the lease based on the garden’s successes.

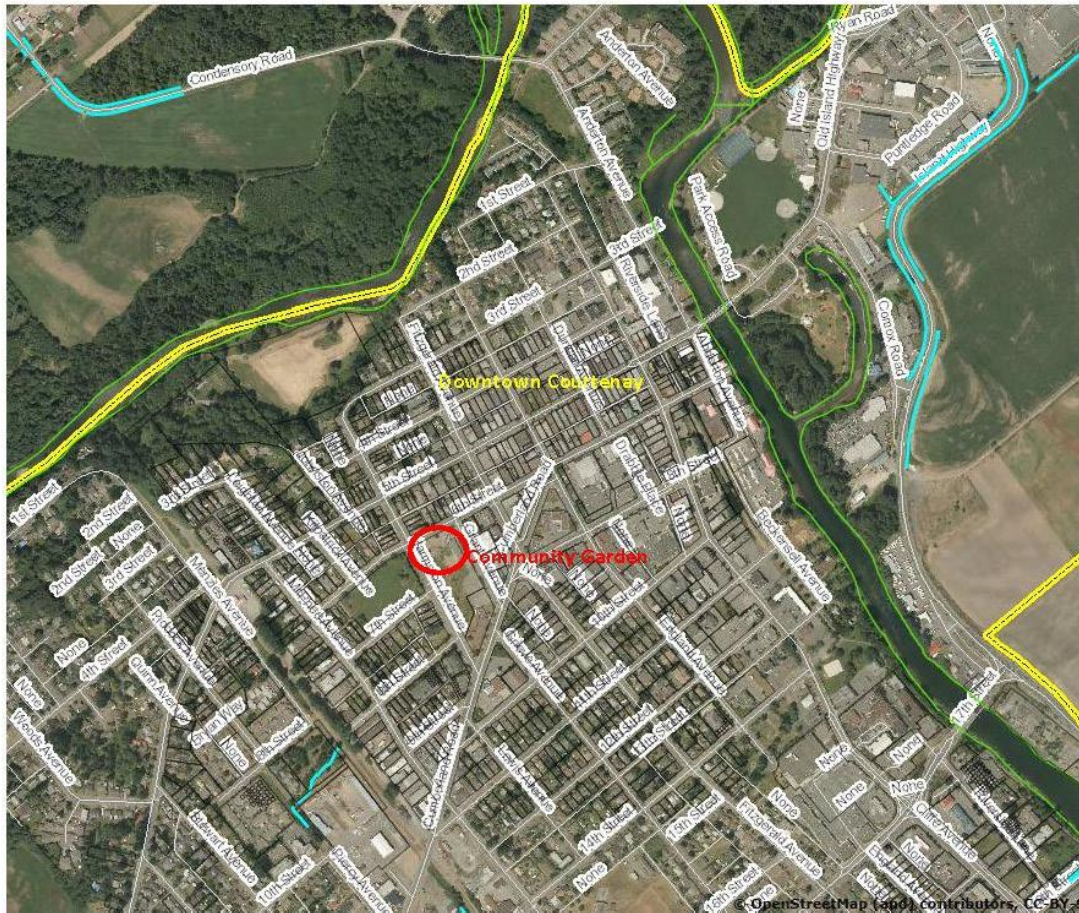
The purpose of the Share the Harvest Community Garden is to provide a place where anyone can have access to land to grow food for themselves and for their community, where gardening education and mentorship are provided, and where social capital is nurtured and grows.

The intended audiences of this plan are multiple. The plan provides:

- a management agreement with the landowner (the City of Courtenay),
- a communication tool for anyone wanting to learn more about the garden.

In addition to this document which is updated every 3 years with input from the garden community there is an additional LUSH Valley Garden Coordinator's manual which is updated annually with key information and details for coordination and management of the site.

¹ LUSH = Let Us Share the Harvest, a Food Security and Action Society and local Food Security HUB (Island Health Initiative). www.lushvalley.org



Share the Harvest Community Garden (SHCG) started as an initiative of the Dawn to Dawn: Action on Homelessness Society² with the goal of supplying food for those in need and to bring people together towards a common goal. Originally referred to as the “Dawn to Dawn Community Garden”, the project started as a 6 month pilot initiative in the spring and summer of 2012. Since then the number of garden beds, the activities within the garden, garden infrastructure and community involvement have grown. In 2013 Dawn to Dawn entered a 5 year lease agreement with the City to provide a degree of certainty that allows for longer-range planning and gardening activities throughout all the seasons. In 2014 LUSH Valley and Dawn to Dawn agreed that the garden administration, programs and overall functioning would be well served by LUSH Valley given their mandate and goals. In early 2015 LUSH became the leaseholder for the project.

If you would like to learn more about the Share the Harvest Community Garden, including contact information and how you can get involved, visit the LUSH Valley website: www.lushvalley.org/share-harvest/

² www.dawntodawn.org

2. Garden Vision

The vision of the Share the Harvest Community Garden is a place where anyone can have access to land to grow food for themselves and for their community, where gardening education and mentorship are provided, and where social capital is nurtured and grows.

3. Garden Objectives + Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

After doing some research, we're convinced that the Share the Harvest Community Garden is a unique expression of capacity building in food security and community-development. Starting with the foundational goals of providing food for the homeless and a place for all backgrounds to interact, the objectives of the Garden remain diverse and pose unique challenges, and opportunities, not present in other Community Gardens.

Objectives for the Garden:

- To continue to be a welcoming place for all backgrounds to participate in the development, care and harvest of the Garden.
- To cultivate connections to Indigenous groups and individuals, and provide space for land based reconnection.
- To provide both private garden beds for rent on an annual basis (also known as "allotment style") as well as public or "commons" beds in which many gardeners simultaneously tend the beds for collective benefit.
- To host and provide a place for educational workshops to the general public with an emphasis on practical gardening skills to strengthen food security capacity locally.
- To provide job training relevant to horticulture, nursery, restoration or landscaping work, especially to youth or people experiencing homelessness.
- To host and provide a place for social gatherings, particularly those involving the sharing of food.
- To continue to grow the number of partners and participants involved in the garden.
- To serve as a 'pilot' or test community garden, the lessons from which can be applied to the development and support of other community gardens, particularly within the City of Courtenay.
- To have sufficient servicing infrastructures such as shed, fence, communication signage, tools and water in order to get work done.
- To provide appropriate garden mentorship and facilitation to community groups, in particular social service partners, who's clients would benefit from gardening.
- To support people experiencing homelessness by providing access to free, nourishing food in a non judgemental space.
- To be a beautiful and safe space in the center of the city where all people are welcome.

The following table summarizes some of the core **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats** at the Garden:

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supportive City Council - Support from the City’s Municipal Works in terms of supplies and some labour for infrastructure and maintenance. - LUSH Valley brings additional funding for coordination and supplies through grants and in-kind support. - In-kind support from numerous local businesses include: Anderton nursery (for plants), Island Enterprises (for soil), CV Seed Savers and Growers for seeds and small equipment. This is valued at \$3,000 or more a year - Volunteer labour is valued at over \$10,650 a year (710 hours in weekly work parties at \$15 per hour) - LUSH Valley keeps a high standard of maintenance and coordination which is consistent over the growing season. - Neighbourhood support - Many community groups and partners participating (including: Brain Injury Society, VIHA Mental Health and Substance Use, John Howard Society, Immigrant Welcome Centre) - General community support - Has now concluded its 12th year, which has provided many lessons for informing future planning - Indigenous peoples’ involvement in the garden includes maintenance of a Medicine Wheel garden, an example of active reconciliation efforts - Free City water available - Fencing and Signage, including an information kiosk has been created 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Difficulty raising consistent funding to support ongoing high level of coordination and maintenance - City support is not enough to adequately fund the maintenance and programming in the garden due to both inflation and increased time responding to conflicts between user groups - Acts of vandalism are becoming more common - Garden infrastructure is starting to deteriorate due to age (wood breakdown) - Uncomfortable activities taking place including overnight camping, storing personal effects, consuming alcohol and drugs, and fighting. - Members of the community report feeling unsafe. - Support from enforcement officers including bylaw and RCMP is inconsistent - Demand for space and food access is beyond the capacity LUSH can provide - Social services support is needed and lacking
Opportunities	Threats

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing further facilitated horticulture therapy sessions for social service partners and clients. - Utilizing produce from STH in other LUSH community service such as Hot Meal Program - To become a demonstration location for innovative practices in low-tech sustainability-oriented gardening, rainwater harvesting, composting, and recycling/repurposing of materials. - Food security and Community Gardens are part of the City OCP. - Installing a greenhouse for earlier/later growing and increased food access - LUSH is interested in creating a framework for processes and structures for self-governing neighbourhood gardens. This would allow the City to expand urban green spaces with reduced administrative oversight from LUSH. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Redevelopment (if it's private or has a traditionally implemented institutional function such as RCMP building) - People using the Garden for unacceptable behaviour, possibly damaging the Garden's reputation, reducing participation, causing its closure or harming individuals.
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4. Garden Layout, On-site Amenities and Design

The garden layout has grown quite 'organically' or informally over the years for a number of reasons:

- founding philosophy of barrier-free access to land for gardening,
- most of the materials used on site have been donated,
- acceptance of experimental and low cost methods of organic gardening, and
- the garden's incremental evolution over time.

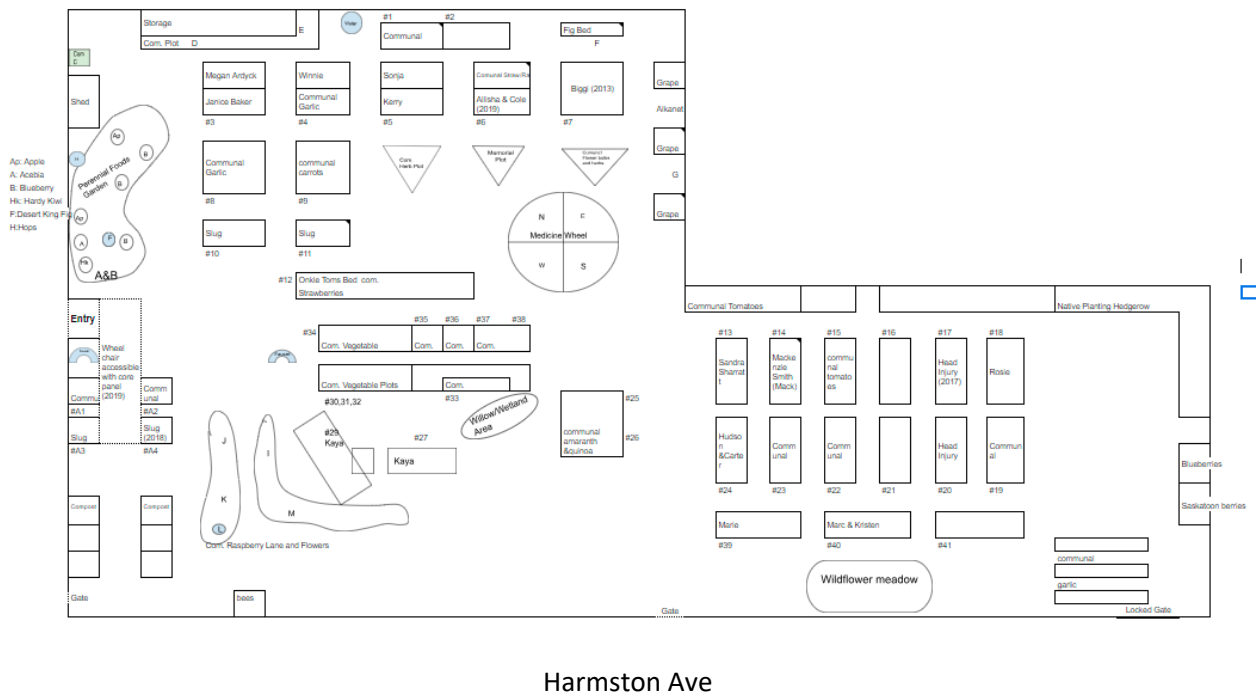
In the last 5 years we have added approximately 46 beds to the site. Approximately 50% of these beds are traditional above ground rectangular beds, while 50% have been built in ground using Hugelkulture soil building principles. Hugelkulture beds do not require the same upkeep and maintenance as raised garden beds, which eventually experience wood rot and disintegration. We are seeing a significant need for repair in both raised and accessible beds.

The garden is now fully fenced, with 4 access gates. We have signage describing the principles and rules of the garden at the main entrance. We also have an information kiosk, which we use to post

information and resources including social services available in the neighbourhood. A map can be found below, and a site view in the Appendix.

The leased area for garden purposes is approximately 1900 square metres in size, has good solar orientation and highly compacted soils from being a former junior high school site. Soil amendments have been imported to build up soil beds.

Share the Harvest Community Garden Map 2024



Services and Infrastructure:

The following section lists the current condition, improvements required and opportunities to be explored for each of the services and infrastructures on site. The difference between *improvements required* and *opportunities to be explored* is that of necessity. Improvements required are deemed to be critical to ensuring the success of the Garden for the 2024 growing season.

A. Water

Current condition: City water from the Carpentry Shop building. This water is provided free of charge to the Garden from the City of Courtenay. One faucet is available at the northwestern corner of the building or northeastern corner of the garden, another is located at the main garden gate, and a third is located approximately 10 metres from the main gate. These faucets have proven to have good pressure, with multiple hoses splitting from each faucet. A range of hose and sprinkler heads are available for general use.

We have a rainwater harvesting system operating off of the garden shed. This allows us to collect 110 gallons of rainwater to be used for watering beds.

Improvements required: Both the faucet on the Carpentry Shop building and at the main entrance are often leaking, and expel a constant flow of water even when not in use. We have contacted Public Works to have the faucet heads changed, but repairs had not been done by the close of the 2023 season when water was shut off.

Opportunities to be explored: Installing an additional faucet in the eastern part of the garden, near the Wildflower Meadow. This would be essential to our long term goal of having the section of the garden fenced for allotment gardeners. It would also allow for higher accessibility for seniors and others with mobility challenges, as there is currently a large distance to move hoses between these eastern beds and the nearest water access.

B. Garden beds and Paths:

Current condition: There are approximately 65 garden beds, including 7 which are accessible using the City of Vancouver’s accessible gardening guidelines (see Appendix). The beds are of varying construction types, sizes and shapes, including a mix of raised beds in wooden boxes and ground level Hugelkulture style beds.

Most of the pathways are grass or dirt and are mowed regularly by LUSH staff and volunteers. Wood chips have been added to some pathways so that constant mowing isn’t required.

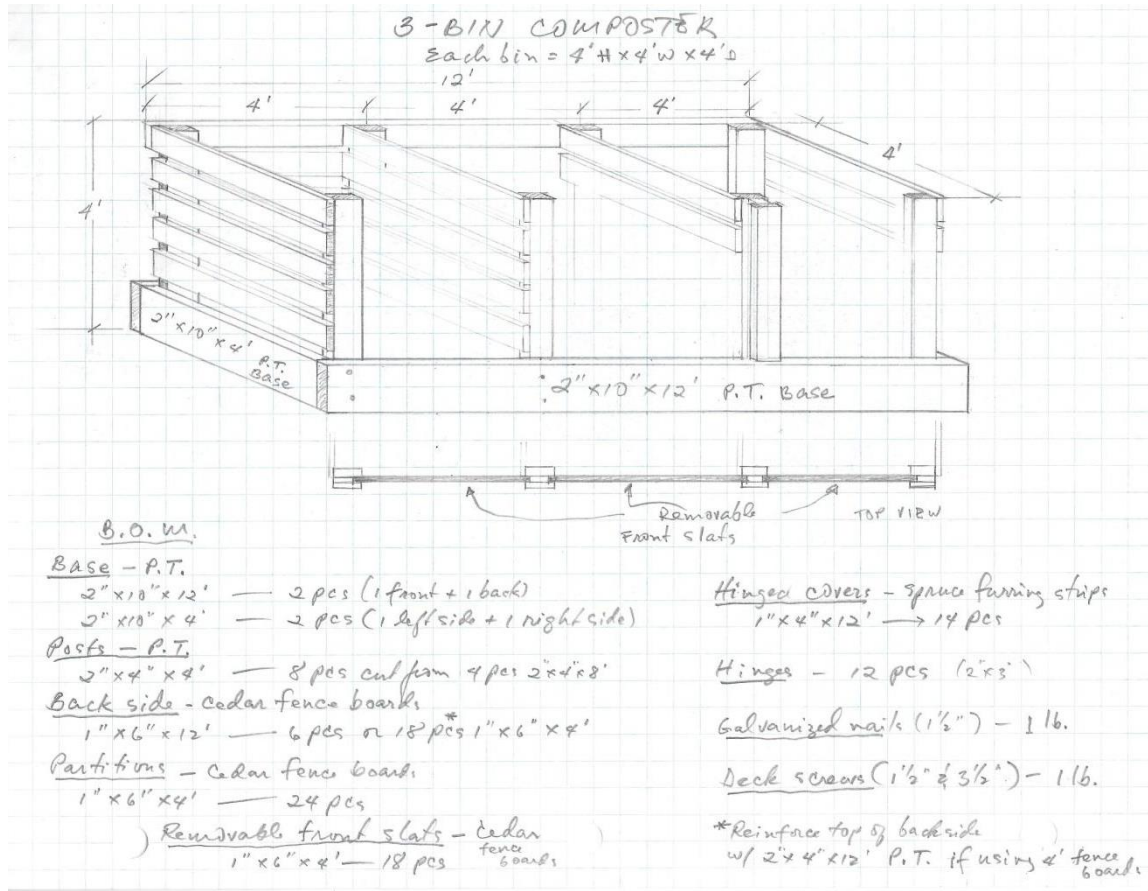
Improvements required: Many of the raised garden beds need on-going maintenance or reconstruction, as wood has deteriorated over time. This is an item on which Public Works in-kind support would be very valuable.

C. Soil and Composting

Current condition: Given that the site was formerly home to the Courtenay Junior High, the areas that have not been cultivated have soil that is not as productive and nutritious as native healthy soils. Soil and soil amendments are required for most of the site and to date have been donated by Vancouver Island Enterprises. It is estimated that over the last 10 years 130 yards of soil and compost have been deposited at the Garden. Soil is deposited in the southwest corner of the garden, just inside the gate entrance.

Additional mulching and Hugelkulture beds have been added, which increases soil diversity and organic matter. These improvements increase the soil's ability to hold moisture and provide necessary nutrients to plants.

Composting facilities are located on site, in the southwest corner of the garden as shown on the site map. The compost bins are three-bin systems constructed of wood. There are an additional three bins for the storage of compost material prior to processing. Composting workshops and education are offered a few times a year for public education.



Improvements required: Soil and finish compost are estimated to be an on-going requirement for the next few years to continue expanding growing space.

Opportunities to be explored: The procurement of an industrial grade wood chipper would expedite the composting process, and allow us to produce a greater volume of high grade compost.

D. Storage:

Current condition: A locked garden shed exists on site, with approximately 20 square feet of storage. We keep valuable garden materials like shovels, hand tools, and seeds inside the shed. The shed is in fairly good condition, though it is susceptible to vandalism and break-ins from time to time.

A locked chain-link compound also exists on the northern perimeter of the site. It is approximately 20 square metres in size, is uncovered and is used to store larger garden materials such as wheelbarrows, construction materials like lumber, stakes, and plant pots.

Ensuring that this area remains tidy, secure and safe is an on-going goal.

Improvements required: We would like a location where people can sit out of the elements, such as a covered picnic area. A greenhouse for seed starting would also improve the utility of the garden.

Opportunities to be explored: A small greenhouse for seed starting including sales. LUSH received funding from United Way to install a greenhouse in 2024.

E. Signage and Communication Boards:

Current condition: With the help of the City of Courtenay Public Works, an information kiosk was installed in 2018 just outside of the garden gates. It functions to inform visitors about the garden and any upcoming events or workshops, and offers phone numbers for LUSH and community resources. A garden sign was installed in 2017 listing the Code of Conduct of the garden.

Other signs in the garden include homemade signs for individual garden beds identifying the species growing. There is a mural on the 6th St side of the garden fence.

Opportunities to be explored: Permanent signage highlighting the no camping and no smoking policies of the garden. These are listed on the Code of Conduct sign on the entrance of the garden, but installing additional signage in high traffic areas may improve adherence to these policies.

F. Fencing and Gates:

Current condition: A perimeter fence has been fully installed with 3 gates in various locations for access to the garden. The fencing is mostly satisfactory, though one panel on the 6th St facing sign of the garden is missing. A temporary wire panel is being used, and held closed by rope. However, this panel is not secure and cannot be locked overnight or through the winter.

Improvements required: We are seeking City support to install a fence that would portion off allotment beds. This would allow allotment gardeners to feel that their plots are safe from being harvested or vandalised, while leaving the remainder of the garden open to diverse user groups who need space to access food.

Opportunities to be explored: Nightly locking and unlocking, operated by a combination of Footprints Security and LUSH.

G. Parking, including bike parking:

Current condition: Gardeners park in the gravel lot adjacent to the 6th St gate. There is adequate vehicle parking for all users in this gravel lot.

Improvements required: A bike rack to encourage active transport to the garden. Location to be outside the garden fence near the gate on Harmston Ave.

5. Garden Activities and Schedule

A number of activities have taken place in the Garden, most of them quite regularly. Upcoming educational workshops can be viewed on the [LUSH Valley Website Events Calendar](#). The following activities are examples of what has occurred over the past years.

- Weekly Wednesday work parties
- Twice annual gardener meetings
- Educational programs and workshops
- Celebratory dinners including year end wrap ups and Reconciliation events
- Impromptu use of the Garden for learning and play

6. Garden protocol – aka “the Rules”

Ensuring enjoyable gardening experience for all of the garden community is the primary goal of these rules and responsibilities. For this reason, observe the rules of the garden, and be a good neighbor.

1. The garden should be a safe place for the community, neighbours, children, and other gardeners. Do not bring anything that will compromise the safety of the garden.
2. Prohibited activities in the garden include consuming alcohol or marijuana, camping.
3. Please be considerate of others if smoking tobacco and dispose of cigarette butts safely.
4. Please avoid using foul language if others are in the garden or area including neighbouring properties.
5. Please check the bulletin board for information concerning the garden - problems, classes, information, notices. Feel free to post information you have and leave messages for other gardeners there.
6. Respect other people’s plots by not picking from unless invited to. Ensure children in your care follow the rules as well.
7. If you are unable to care for your plot for a time because of illness or vacation, ask a fellow gardener or the coordinator for help with weeding and harvesting.
8. Keep tall plants such as corn or sunflowers at the center of your plot so they do not shade your neighbors plants.
9. If you use the garden’s tools, please return them to the storage area when done. Contact LUSH Valley to obtain the combination lock code for the tool area.
10. Dogs in the garden must be on leash and picked up after.
11. Do not drive into or park in the garden area. Limited parking is available for drop off of materials. Please always park on the street.
12. Do not access the site via Grant ave. Will provide a map.
13. Aim to conserve water use
14. Dispose of compost and trash in the appropriate bins.
15. No pesticides are allowed – please use organic gardening methods
16. No invasive species are permitted to be planted
17. Diseased and infected plants must be removed from garden and disposed of properly.
18. When in doubt about any of the above or if you have any other questions ask the Garden Coordinator or LUSH Valley. 250 331 0152 LUSH main office.

7. Different Roles and Ways to Participate in the Garden

The following section describes how the different groups of people work with each other and the larger framework of participants recognizing that a founding goal remains for the Garden to be accessible to everyone:

A. LUSH (Let Us Share the Harvest) Valley Food Action Society

Lease holder and primary contact to the City. All administrative items and ultimate authority rests with LUSH Valley who consults with the City of Courtenay on any changes to uses within the leased area.

LUSH Valley Food Action Society hires a Share the Harvest Garden Coordinator (GC) each year to Coordinate the garden. The length of the position and number of hours may vary based on available funding. The GC works with stakeholders to manage the garden; coordinates and secures cooperation of participants and project partners and maintains continuity. Other responsibilities include:

- Garden planning, organizing, general maintenance and event planning,
- Experience working with gardens, farms or in the agricultural or horticultural sector, and be up to date on sustainable gardening methods.
- Must be excellent at problem solving and multitasking as these are an important component of the position.
- Experience working with marginalized people or a background in social work is an asset.
- Responsible for the general maintenance of the Lush Valley Demonstration and Commons Gardens including planning, planting, weeding, watering, composting, harvesting
- Responsible for general grounds keeping of the community garden including landscaping and lawn mowing
- Oversee onsite safety
- Coordinate volunteer activities in the garden
- Be a friendly point person for gardeners and community members. Answer on-site questions and concerns
- Work with Executive Director and Program Manager on upcoming garden improvement projects (ie: building garden beds etc)
- Plan regular work-parties, potlucks and workshops for gardeners and members of LUSH Valley and the community
- Communicate with gardeners and community members via email

B. Allotment holders

Garden plots are assigned on a first come first serve basis with members from the previous year having the priority opportunity to renew for the upcoming year. A wait-list currently exists for garden plots. Payment of dues must be done at the beginning of the gardening year (spring). All allotment holders shall sign and abide by the Allotment Guidelines document (Plot Holders Agreement)(Appendix).

C. Volunteers

Volunteers are the lifeblood of any community garden initiative and are encouraged and welcomed. The STH garden sees approximately 710 hours of volunteer involvement annually in weekly work parties alone. To get involved, contact LUSH Valley.

D. Casual visitors, workshop participants, facilitated tours

Visitors are encouraged to stroll the garden at their leisure and to get involved in the many activities scheduled throughout the year. A community information kiosk is at the entrance of the garden and keeps the wider community informed.

8. Fund- and in-kind materials

- Each year the City of Courtenay provides LUSH Valley with \$10,000 for maintenance and programing at the garden. LUSH Valley raises an additional \$10,000 in funding support each year through grants and donations.
- The Public Works department provides \$1000 of in-kind support
- City of Courtenay provides use of the land and water

Appendix A – Plotholders Agreement

Share the Harvest Community Garden Gardener's Agreement 2024

The Share the Harvest Community Garden, facilitated by LUSH Valley Food Action Society, is a space where people can grow their own food, build community, learn from one another and share in the harvest.

The garden was originally established by Dawn to Dawn: Action on Homelessness Society as a healing space built by the community, for the community, where those of our city's most marginalized people would have a place to go to access fresh food and to interact with other members of the community.

In 2015 LUSH Valley took over the garden lease and now the garden is an integral part of our ever expanding Urban Agriculture program. The land on which the garden sits, is owned by the City of Courtenay and leased by LUSH Valley. In 2019 LUSH Valley entered into the first ever partnership agreement with the City which includes a 5 year lease agreement and some funding to support (in part) the Garden Coordinator. We are excited to be recognized as a partner with the City of Courtenay.

Facilities:

This garden has a mix of both allotment and common gardens. Any community members are allowed to harvest from the communal plots.

We have a locked shed and a locked uncovered chain-link tool area located at the back of the garden for tool storage. The gate for the tool storage remains locked at all times unless gardening. The combination for the shed lock is [REDACTED], while the combination to the fenced lockup is [REDACTED]

Access to city water is from two water outlets with hoses long enough to reach all plots. Adjacent to the tool area, is the master water shut-off. This needs to be turned on before any of the other water outlets will work, and should be turned off when you leave the garden.

We do our best to have garden soil and compost onsite for gardener use, but as we receive these amendments by donation they are not always available. The coordinator will let gardeners know if other items become available, such as cover crop seed, straw bales, etc.

Everyone is Welcome:

Community members from many different backgrounds spend time here gardening or just enjoying their surroundings and connecting with others. The garden is a place where all people can feel comfortable and are treated with respect and dignity.

As this is an urban garden without a locked fence. It is possible that personal plots may be harvested by someone who is hungry and in immediate need. Please expect that roughly 20% of your crops may get harvested.

Events:

We host a variety of events such as workshops, work-parties and potlucks at the garden to unite and educate gardeners and community members who are passionate or curious about growing good food. Depending on COVID protocols these may be in person or online. Check out LUSH's Urban Ag facebook page or website for more info.

**** PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING AND SIGN BELOW****

Plotholders Agreement:

Garden plots are open to anyone, with priority given to social service organizations and individuals who do not have access to growing space. If you already have access to growing space, please refrain from having a private plot and instead consider working in the communal plots or other garden projects. Plotholders we welcome you! There are certain agreements listed below that plotholders agree to.

As the caretaker LUSH will agree to:

1. Provide 1 load of soil/compost and 1 load of wood chips at the beginning of the growing season.
2. Provide and maintain essential tools for gardeners.
3. Liaise with city and contractors in case of needed repairs or infrastructure upgrades.
4. Facilitate once weekly work parties from April to November.
5. Facilitate regular meetings for gardeners.
6. Assign plots and coordinate gardener communications.

As a Gardener, you agree to:

1. **Agree to adhere to all current COVID Protocols. The coordinator will update you all on what these may be.**
2. **Understand that LUSH is a food security organization focusing on some of the most marginalized populations. These populations are welcomed into the garden as participants and community members. As a gardener at STH you agree to be courteous, and considerate of all people who use this space.**
3. Contribute 4 or more hours per month to support the communal plots. We ask that each gardener join a maintenance team to collaborate in the garden or attend work parties. If you are not able to contribute volunteer hours please let the coordinator know and they will make other arrangements (we want to welcome everyone!).
4. Attend at least 3 of our garden meetings and read the notes taken from each meeting.
5. If you are able to, you provide a donation of \$20-40 to LUSH Valley (a charitable non-profit) for use of your plot. No one is turned away for lack of funds.

6. Clean up after yourself. Place plant debris and garden waste in the designated areas. If you see trash or debris in the common areas of the garden please pick them up and place them in the appropriate area.
7. No pesticides and herbicides. We practice ecological gardening here.
8. No large perennials such as fruit trees are allowed in your individual plots.
9. This garden focuses on food security, so please prioritize plants in your garden that are edible, medicinal or pollinator friendly.
10. Do not harvest from others' individual plots without the plot holders permission.
11. No alcohol, drugs or smoking in the garden.
12. If your garden plot is left unattended for two weeks you will be contacted and asked to attend to your plot. Please let the coordinator know if you will be away, or require help. If your plot is not being maintained it will be offered to the next person on the waitlist. If this is the case it will be well communicated by the garden coordinator.
13. Plots cannot be transferred to other people. Only the coordinator has the right to reassign a plot. If you are unable to attend your garden, please let the Garden Coordinator know immediately.
14. Plots are not guaranteed year to year. You must contact the coordinator by April 1st of each year and fill out a gardeners agreement to ensure your plot.
15. We live in a climate with frequent water restrictions during the summer months. Please use water sparingly.
16. Make sure that water is turned off before you leave the garden.
17. Please ensure your garden plot is cleaned up by October 20th. If you are interested in winter gardening, contact the coordinator before this date.
18. While garden materials such as soil amendments and seeds may be made available, gardeners are primarily responsible for providing these items for their personal plots.
19. From time to time beds may need to be upgraded or moved. This may be based on requests from the City, or the need for the overall use of the space based on programming.
20. Please remember that this is a community garden and although you are free to do whatever you like in your private plot, the communal areas are available to all members to participate in. Decisions for all communal areas will be made during meetings and workparties and no single gardener can claim a section of the communal areas for their own use.

Conflict Agreement:

Working within a diverse community can cause conflict. Conflict can be very positive, when done skillfully. As a member of the STH garden you agree to:

1. No aggressive, abusive, hostile language directed at anyone in the garden. i.e. swearing.
2. No language or behaviour that is racist, homophobic, transphobic, ageist, ableist or oppressive in any way.
3. Not discuss another member of the garden (i.e. gossip) when they are not there. Issues with other gardeners or events can be discussed during the meetings or brought to the attention of the coordinator.
4. No yelling or arguing.

5. No bossy gardening. There are all levels of gardeners and all different styles of working with the land. If you would like to give someone advice, please ask if they would like it first.

Consequences:

Inability to adhere to the conflict agreement will result in immediate removal from the garden.

Gardeners can re-apply the following year.

Gardener's Signature:

Plot Number(s):

Date:

Contact Us:

Email: communitygarden@lushvalley.org

Ph: 250-331-0152



LUSH VALLEY

Appendix B – Site Map



Appendix C – Accessibility Guidelines

Background and Details

Accessible Community Garden Guidelines 2011

Prepared by the Joint Subcommittee on Accessible Community Gardens
City of Vancouver Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee and Seniors Advisory Committee

PLOTS: At least 5% of plots should be accessible raised beds; 10-20% is ideal

Reasons:

Approximately 12% of people have a disability. However, people with disabilities have a significantly greater need for community garden plots because they have the lowest incomes in Canada, have extremely low home ownership, and are unlikely to have their own gardening space.

Seniors constitute a significant part of the population and may have difficulty bending to use in-ground garden plots.

Many persons who do not consider themselves disabled have knee, back or hip injuries or chronic health conditions which limit their ability to bend or reach an in-ground plot.

Dimensions of accessible raised bed plots

Width: 3-4' wide, if bed can be reached from both sides; 3½' wide is ideal
1½-2' wide, if bed can only be reached from one side; 1¾' wide is ideal

Reasons:

Most books recommend a maximum of 2' for one-sided-beds & 4' for two sided beds, but many people (especially women) have a shorter arm reach. To accommodate everyone, ideal width is 3½' for beds reachable on two sides and 1¾' for beds reachable on only one side.

Please note: If a person has to work in a raised bed from a wheelchair, the wheels of the chair reduce the maximum arm reach (the wheels are between the bed & the person.)

Height: 2 – 3' high

Reasons:

Comfortable height of a person's arm varies significantly, so it may be wise to build some beds at different heights.

Some people may prefer to sit on or transfer to a stool when gardening. Bed height should be in the lower range to accommodate this option.

Some people may need to stand to garden, rather than sit. Bed height should be in the higher range to accommodate this option.

It is easier for a person to reach slightly down into a bed, than to reach up.

If a person is in a wheelchair, two factors affect arm height:

- height of the wheelchair from ground to seat (average: 19"; range: 12"-20")
- height of the person's body from seat to arm (average: 19";)

Recommendation: Build beds at different heights, between 2-3', to accommodate different needs.

Dimensions of accessible raised bed plots, continued

Surface: Minimum 4' wide accessible surface surrounding accessible raised beds

- Surface around raised beds should be accessible (wheel-able), and not a hazard for persons with canes, walkers, limited mobility etc. Acceptable surfaces include compacted crushed granite fines, compacted crushed limestone, other compacted crushed materials, concrete, pavement, bricks, pavers etc.
- Accessible surface should be a least 4' around all sides of each bed; 5' is ideal. This enables a person using a wheelchair to manoeuvre and work from all sides of the accessible raised bed, and to turn

Corners: Brightly marked or painted so that people with low vision or blindness can find plots

Length: Length of raised bed does not affect accessibility, but longer beds are harder to build properly and maintain.

Shape: Any shape is accessible if the maximum width at any point is 4', and if indentations are at least 4' wide

- Any shape is accessible as long as the maximum reach across one side of the bed is no more then 2' (1½' is ideal), if indentations are at least 4' wide, and a 4-5' accessible surface surrounds every side
- Rectangular beds
 - simple to construct
 - less gardening space than E, S, T, U or W shaped beds.
 - Ideal dimensions for rectangular bed: 3½' wide; 10-12' long
- Beds shaped like a "E" "S" "T", "U", or "W"
 - more difficult to construct
 - provide more gardening space, more efficient use of space
 - An E or W-shaped bed has two indentations – if the indentations are at least 4' wide, the bed is accessible and an efficient use of space
 - An S-shaped bed, has the same gardening space as an E-shaped bed, and is interesting & attractive
 - U or horseshoe-shaped beds are accessible, attractive, and an efficient use of space
- Tabletop beds:
 - Tabletop beds are like a tabletop on a pedestal -- there's a shallow gardening bed on the top (6-10" deep), supported by a base that does not come out to the sides, & an accessible surface under the table
 - This design enables a person in a wheelchair to put their legs under the table, allowing the person to place their body closer to the edge of the gardening bed – this allows improved reach/agility
 - Tabletop beds are in use at Pearson Centre & Pandora Garden. Designs are on the City Farmer website.

PATHS: Accessible surface, at least one access path 5'+ wide or 4'+ wide with 5' turning circle; other paths 3' wide minimum

Accessible Path Surfaces:

- Accessible path surfaces must be smooth, level, wheel-able, with tactile guide markers
- Concrete & asphalt: most ideal surfaces
 - Safe, easy to travel on for people who use wheelchairs; people who use walkers; people who use canes; people who have limited mobility; & for people who walk but have risks of falling
 - Expensive options
 - Many feel are unattractive in a garden
 - Tactile guide markers may be imbedded along the centre of paved paths for persons who are blind or with low vision.
- Compacted crushed granite fines, compacted crushed limestone or other compacted crushed materials
 - Less ideal to walk or wheel on than concrete
 - Less expensive and simpler to install than concrete; more natural appearance
 - Must be compacted to be accessible
 - Do not need guide markers as the surface is different from surrounding area
- Bricks, pavers etc
 - Attractive & accessible if maintained properly
 - Safety may become an issue if bricks are not maintained; uneven cracks can pose safety hazard
 - Do not need guide markers as the surface is different from surrounding area

PATHS CONTINUED

Non-Accessible Path Surfaces

- Bark mulch
 - Not an accessible surface. Persons using manual wheelchairs cannot travel on bark mulch; bark mulch is a falling/tripping hazard for seniors, people using canes, walkers etc.
- Grass
 - Not an accessible surface. Slippery and a hazard when wet. Bumpy & uneven if not closely mowed.
- Dirt
 - Not an accessible surface. Slippery and a hazard when wet.
- Gravel
 - Not an accessible surface. Uneven & unstable – not wheel-able; tripping hazard for ambulatory people.

Path width

- At least one access path: 5'+ wide of 4'+ wide with 5' turning circle; 5'+ is ideal
- All other paths minimum 3' wide

Reasons:

Five foot width is the minimum width for a person in a wheelchair to turn around (wheelchairs vary in width, but scooters and larger power chairs are wide and sometimes long). 3' width is the minimum width for a person in a wheelchair to pass.

Tactile Guide Markers imbedded in solid concrete or asphalt paths

If path surface is solid concrete or asphalt, tactile guide marker may be imbedded along the centre of the path for persons who are blind or with low vision.

Curbs

Optional: this helps ensure paths do not erode; important that curbs don't create a barrier.

WATER ACCESS: Taps 2' high minimum; placed at or very near accessible raised beds; placed within 20' of each plot

- Water taps need to be high enough for a person in a wheelchair or a person who has trouble bending to reach. This means water taps must be at least 2' high, with a maximum height of 4'
- Many people with disabilities and seniors have difficulty carrying a hose and/or turning a tap. Many people who do not have a disability have difficulty carrying heavy or long hoses.
 - Taps should therefore be located frequently throughout the garden – one tap within 20' of each plot
 - This enables every gardener to carry only one 25' hose to water a plot
 - Taps should also be attached to, or very close to, raised beds
 - This enables seniors and people with disabilities who require an accessible raised bed to not carry a hose
 - Drip watering systems installed on accessible raised beds, with easy turn on/off switches, provide accessible water access for seniors or people with disabilities in an affordable manner
- Taps should be brightly coloured or painted to ensure persons with limited vision or blindness can find them

SEATING: Appropriate seating should be provided in the garden for seniors and others who need to sit

Accessibility for Everyone

The details mentioned above sometimes focus on people who are blind or who use wheelchairs, because specific technical accommodation is needed.

However, most of these accommodations also meet the needs of people with other disabilities and seniors.

A few examples:

- Surfaces that are bumpy and uneven are not accessible for people using wheelchairs, but they are also difficult and a safety and tripping hazard for people who use walkers or canes; seniors; people with visual impairments; people with balance or mobility impairments etc.
- Raised beds make gardening possible for people with back problems, for people who have problems bending, etc. Many seniors find in-ground gardening difficult/impossible; raised beds solve this problem.
- Water access: many seniors have difficulty bending to a low tap and/or carrying a hose; the recommended adaptations for people with wheelchairs also solve these problems for persons who are frail and/or seniors.

Background and Underlying Problem

People with disabilities have a higher need for, and are uniquely dependent on, public garden space to grow their own food, and enjoy green space.

This is because many disabled people are poor and may have chronic health conditions, which make a fresh diet important. But fresh produce is often too expensive to afford, and home gardening isn't a viable option because homeownership is severely limited for people with disabilities (due to low income and limited accessible housing).

Unfortunately, most community gardens in Vancouver exclude seniors and people with disabilities simply because they are not properly designed and have barriers. Paths between plots are too narrow for wheelchairs to pass, garden plots are in the ground or too low for persons to reach, raised beds are too low or too wide to reach, water taps are too low, path surfaces are too bumpy or sloped, toolsheds cannot be entered etc. Seniors face similar issues bending to the ground, to taps, carrying heavy hoses, etc

Solutions:

- **New community gardens must be accessible:**
Establish a "building code" for community gardens that ensures that new community gardens are built in a way that is accessible for seniors and persons with disabilities
 - New gardens should submit accessible garden plans for approval before building the new garden (in the same way that a builder has to submit building plans which must meet safety and building code accessibility standards in order to be approved)
- Accessible pathways and accessible water systems/taps should be provided by the City as part of the infrastructure it provides to newly built community gardens

Reasons

Accessible Pathways

- Accessible pathways are an integral and crucial part of accessibility in community gardens, and all other aspects of accessibility are nullified if the paths are not accessible
- Installing accessible pathways is beyond the technical capacity of community gardeners
- City staff have the relevant expertise to install accessible pathways properly
- Cost should be less than \$500 for each new community garden

Accessible Water service

- Accessible water service is an integral and crucial part of accessibility in community gardens
- The City already installs water service in new community gardens on City land
- The work and cost for the City to ensure that the water system is accessible at the outset is minimal
- The work to modify an existing water system to make it accessible later on is considerable

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References and Sources for these Guidelines

References

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- Yeomans, Kathleen: The Able Gardener: Overcoming Barriers of Age & Physical Limitations; Storey Communications, 1992.

Consultations with:

- Bredner, Gerry: GB Bobcat, Contractor who built Terra Nova Community Garden
- Carter, Tom: Manager of Field Operations, UBC Farm
- Kylo, Rick., Park Board Operations Supervisor, Area North, Vancouver
- Pottinger, Guy: Manager of Maintenance, Stanley Park, Vancouver
- Simpson, Patrick: Universal Design Consultant; Executive Director, SAFER Homes Society
- Canadian Horticulture Therapy Association
- Community consultations with disability organizations including DIGA (Disabled Independent Gardeners Association), BC Coalition of Persons with Disabilities, BC Paraplegic Association, Pearson Hospital, GF Strong, etc; seniors organizations including COABC, Community Garden Network Project, 411 Seniors, etc; community groups including Village Vancouver, Friends of the UBC Farm, Strathcona Community Centre, Evergreen, etc; community gardens including Cottonwood Community Garden, Strathcona Community Garden, Pandora Community Garden, Farmers on 57th, etc.

These guidelines have been prepared by the Joint Subcommittee on Accessible Community Gardens, City of Vancouver Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee and Seniors Advisory Committee, 2009/2010