



# LUSH VALLEY

To whom it may concern,

LUSH Valley is seeking an increase in financial support from the City of Courtenay in operating the Share the Harvest Community Garden.

LUSH currently receives \$10000 per fiscal year, with \$1000 in in-kind funding provided by Public Works. We are seeking to increase that amount to \$12000 per fiscal year plus a 2% increase annually (to adjust for inflation), with \$5000 in in-kind funding. Our justification for these increased requests are outlined below.

## 1. Increased administrative workload

LUSH has been required to dedicate an increased amount of time to conflict mitigation at STH. This includes removing encampments, doing site cleanups, time spent connecting with By-law, seeking supports for vulnerable community members, and responding to concerns from gardeners. The diverse user groups require far higher time allocated to mediation. LUSH has joined initiatives including bi-weekly Coalition to End Homelessness meetings in an attempt to join the concerted efforts for equitable treatment of vulnerable populations, who often use the garden as a resource for food and shelter.

## 2. Peer program requires additional trainings

LUSH's mission includes providing equitable access to nourishing food. One user group of the STH garden is people experiencing homelessness, who are more likely to be food insecure. LUSH has dedicated a portion of the City funding to our Peer Program, which engages vulnerable populations in work training while providing payment and food share in return. Administering this program requires additional training to ensure the safety of these diverse user groups. LUSH has offered the following trainings, free to the community, since the inception of our Peer Program:

- Naloxone training
- First Aid training
- Anti-stigma training

## 3. Reconciliation requires relationship building

One major success of the STH garden has been the creation of a Medicine Wheel garden, maintained by Indigenous individuals and organizations including the Indigenous Women's Sharing Society and Wachiay Friendship Centre. LUSH is actively supporting reconnection to the land by listening to Indigenous voices and creating space for land based traditional practices. These relational connections require a slow build of mutual trust and commitment.

LUSH endeavors to put Truth and Reconciliation into practice at the STH garden, and within the last 5 years has developed the Medicine Wheel garden and associated relationships to reflect this commitment.

#### 4. Climate change affects garden management and infrastructure

The STH operates within a global environmental crisis, resulting in unpredictable weather events, higher likelihood of drought, and annual water restrictions. As a result, LUSH staff have had to alter management plans and create new systems to maintain plant health. These include restructuring the garden (species selection, slope consideration), increasing mulching levels, creating water catchment systems, purchasing and installing more effective irrigation systems, and watering within restriction limits. The planning and infrastructure requirements to adapt to climate change require additional funds.

#### 5. Higher costs of living

Between December 2022 to December 2023, [the rate of inflation in BC was 3.4%](#). This has resulted in increased costs for all supplies and materials related to garden programming and maintenance. Many garden beds were built between 2012-2018, and are beginning to disintegrate due to age. The cost of lumber and time spent repairing beds is a significant expense in the STH budget.

Increased costs of living are also impacting members of the community, and increasing the demand for the services that community gardens provide. We are seeing an uptick in demand for growing space, affordable food, and shelter. LUSH is attempting to meet these demands within time, material, and spatial constraints. We require a higher budget to respond to the higher demand for services.

#### 6. LUSH increasing to living wage

In 2023, LUSH brought staff wages up based on living wage guidelines. This resulted in a wage increase of \$2 per hour for most staff. LUSH is working towards becoming a living wage employer, and created a new wage structure with living wage as the lowest tier and increases according to level of responsibility and time with the organization. The garden coordinator wage currently sits at \$26.79 per hour, with an average of 12 hours per week dedicated to administration, programming, and maintenance of the STH garden.

Thus far, LUSH has covered the increased expenses of STH through grant funding. However, funding is becoming increasingly competitive, and each year LUSH is scrambling to find enough money to maintain the program. There is no continuity in grant funding amounts, resulting in a lack of security for both staffing and programming. The increased workload associated with running the garden during the housing and affordability crises have been thus far unmatched by funding increases. LUSH is requesting an increase to both funding and in-kind support to deliver the same level of programming and food access to the community.



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### **2024 Business Case for Share the Harvest Community Garden as a continued partner to the City of Courtenay**

Since taking on a leadership role with LUSH Valley, I come to the position with over 15 years of experience running and designing food systems and food security programming. I have worked in multiple educational/community gardens and through trial and error and working with 4 different organizations and multiple municipal councils, I have seen what works and what doesn't in community garden settings.

Having been in the Executive Director role at LUSH Valley for 7 years- working with a number of Garden Coordinators and Managers, the organization has continued to learn what works well in the Share the Harvest garden, and where there are barriers to success.

The single most important element to making sure that a community garden is well kept, welcoming and utilized is by having a consistent coordinator that has both the people skills and the garden skills to provide consistency in management, expectations and programing, and build relationships with gardeners, and the public.

At the Share the Harvest garden, we are not just offering allotment plots and access to growing food space, but providing communal garden areas, educational workshops, and mentorship to support the building of skills, the management of healthy relationships and the knowledge of ecological food growing.

LUSH Valley is committed to creating a welcoming and beautiful, urban space that provides access to the garden to anyone that wants to visit, and provides growing space and mentorship to those that might not otherwise have access to the growing space or skills. This means we have gardeners and participation from people from many different walks of life integrating and building community together.

For the last 5 years the Share the Harvest Community Garden is the City of Courtenay's only official and publicly accessible community garden. Share the Harvest, located in the heart of the downtown Courtenay and services people living in the City of Courtenay.

But you may ask: "Why does the City of Courtenay need a community garden?" The community garden provides a lot of value to the City of Courtenay residents- through a partnership with LUSH Valley the City of Courtenay can continue to support the garden as a well-being service to all residents- having several social, financial, and ecological benefits, showing a strong returns on a relatively small investment.

In the summer of 2023 myself and Carley came and presented to the Mayor and Council. With the revised OCP and the Food Systems chapter of the OCP the Share the Harvest garden is aligned with the OCP goals and the implementation of the new Food Systems Chapter. . The presentation was well received by the Council.

The cost of running the garden well and efficiently each year has increased from about \$20,000 in 2018 to about \$45,000 in 2024 due to increases in costs for materials and supplies,

LUSH Valley Food Action Society  
T: 250-331-0152  
2342 Rosewall Crescent, Courtenay, BC V9N 8R9  
E: admin@lushvalley.org  
CRA # 866653637RR0001



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increased wages for staff as well as increased hours to properly manage and provide educational and community building opportunities. We are asking for a slight increase in support in the next 5 years to cover a fraction of the increased costs.

LUSH Valley has asked the City of Courtenay for \$12,000 towards coordination of the garden each year (towards annual supplies and Coordinators hours), as well as \$5000 of in-kind support, in order to keep the infrastructure of the garden such as fencing, shed, beds, water, as well as support with security of the garden each year. Our track record has shown that we bring at least double, but often triple or quadruple the financial value to the project, bringing in additional funds to more than match the City's contribution. In addition we have asked for a 2% increase each year to go towards the increased costs. It is to be understood that LUSH Valley over the years has gone from needing to bring in revenues to match the value of the City in 2019, to now needing to bring in triple the value to properly maintain and manage the garden. The City is benefiting greatly from the additional value that LUSH brings at a 1 (City) :3 (LUSH) ratio.

We have also built a number of relationships with local business's and volunteers which will bring an additional value of approximately \$15,000 in-kind to the garden each year. So with the City's 12K investment the financial return will be roughly \$63,000 each year.

Basic break-down of costs (this may fluctuate slightly year to year based on additional projects or infrastructure needs) and will be reviewed after 5 years:

In general staffing costs: \$30,000 (Coordinator, ED (supervisor), additional educational facilitators).

Materials and supplies: \$8000

In-kind value of materials and labour: \$15,000 + 5000 (City of Courtenay)= \$20000 (or more)

Administrative costs: \$5000 (this has also increased due to grant and reporting requirements as well as bylaw issues).

The benefits to the City of Courtenay of the Share the Harvest Community Garden:

It is important to note that in general, most municipalities across BC have one or more community gardens, particularly in urban locations- in fact it is becoming the norm. The benefits in general of community gardens have been well documented:

“They provide opportunities for both recreational gardening and food production, in underutilized spaces. Community gardens are also great for the environment. Food grown locally reduces greenhouse gasses produced by long distance transportation of food. Gardens also contribute to biodiversity of species and help to support populations of pollinators. Finally, community gardens bring people together and may reduce crime rates in the neighbourhood by increasing visibility and engaging citizens in positive initiatives”

Community gardens contribute to a healthy lifestyle by:

- providing fresh, safe, affordable herbs, fruits and vegetables
- helping to relieve stress and increase sense of wellness
- getting people active, which improves overall physical health
- providing social opportunities that build a sense of community and belonging

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- giving people an opportunity to learn and share knowledge on gardening, nature, and cooking” (Community Garden Council of Waterloo Region).

As well as the general benefits of community gardens there are some specific benefits to the City of Courtenay, and include the following:

- Beautification and utilization an urban space at the heart of downtown Courtenay
- Facilitation of therapeutic gardening sessions for people in programs where they are learning to develop skills to help cope with mental health and/or addictions (Partnership with John Howard and VIHA Mental Health and Substance Use)
- Space is used for tours and educational opportunities for school, daycares, summer camps and college students. (2018 provided tours to 50 children, as well as providing a garden bed for the ‘Head Start’ program).
- We are continuing to build a community of people who care deeply about the garden, and work together to ensure that the space stays maintained and safe. (We had 130 people garden, take a workshop and /or volunteer in 2018- we also created 8 new garden beds).
- Additional fresh food is grown and donated to partners providing meals to those who otherwise wouldn’t have access. (Food in 2018 went to Mental Health and Substance Use, CV Transition Society and the CV Food Bank).
- First Nations and Metis gardeners are represented through our medicine wheel and workshops on traditional foods and medicines. (We had two traditional medicine and food workshops facilitated by a Metis elder in 2018 and have more planned for 2019).
- People with disabilities have access to growing food in an area designed for this purpose. (We created 3 new accessibility beds in 2018 and have plans to improve the space for those with accessibility issues in 2019).
- These types of preventative health and wellness programs have been shown to save money in the long term on emergency services and health related costs.

A cared for active garden is not a one time project but rather a living system that needs to be continually cared for. This is our garden in our community, and the return on investment has and business case has been proven year over year in the last 5 years.

With the City of Courtenay providing some base funding for the garden, it will ensure long-term stability of these community benefits and will make it easier to leverage additional funding and support. Thank-you for your partnership, we are looking forward to another 5 years!

Please contact me at [maurita@lushvalley.org](mailto:maurita@lushvalley.org) for further correspondence.

Sincerely,

Maurita Prato, Executive Director

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