**Policies to Foster Community Gardens**

**Report from the Community Gardens committee to the Clallam County Food Policy Council**

**January 6, 2011**

Committee members: Carmela Alexander, Karen Bert, John Burdick, Hank Gibson, Robin Gibson, Diane Martin, Jill Zarzeczny

**Introduction**

Community gardens are of several varieties. Some are plots of land worked by a group of individuals for their own shared benefit or for the benefit of some other entity, such as a Food Bank. Some are school-based and serve both the children’s nutrition and their education about food. Other community gardens are divided into plots that are assigned to individual gardeners. The land may be informally lent, donated, or leased from the owner. In some communities, a governmental entity may be the organizer, leasing plots and organizing volunteers and/or paid staff to accomplish shared work. In other communities, groups of individuals may form a nonprofit organization to accomplish this work, in communication/coordination with city staff. (This is the organizational form recommended by our committee.) Typically gardeners pay a yearly fee for use of a garden plot and they promise some work hours to maintain the common areas in the garden, such as pathways, compost, or perimeter plantings.

**Benefits**

Community gardens grow more than vegetables. They build healthy bodies through exercise and better nutrition. They grow relationships among neighbors. They create healthy, livable neighborhoods, turning vacant lots or underused public land into oases of green abundance. These gardens are a visual delight for residents and visitors, and they enhance the property values for nearby homes. Community gardens educate participants in food production, as well as in both self-reliance and interdependence. They provide fresh food for the Food Bank. They bolster a community’s food security.

For all these reasons communities from Maine to Washington are supporting—and being supported by—community gardens. The American Community Gardens Association fosters this growth and supports the establishment of new gardens and gardeners through education on gardening, shared information about the mechanics of running gardens, and an assemblage of best practices for starting and maintaining gardens. No community need forge an untried path: many thriving community gardens already exist and the steps for success are documented. (See the Resources section at the end of this report for an annotated list of documents and websites that offer information about community gardening or tools for successfully implementing and maintaining community gardens.)

**How Policy Makers Can Smooth the Way: Clearing the Path to Implementation**

Local governments, city and county, need to create a framework for community gardens:

* As a first step, there should be a proclamation recognizing and supporting the many benefits of community gardens.
* Comprehensive Land Use Plans and zoning ordinances need to be modified to allow the possibility—and recognize the importance— of community gardens. (See sample comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance language in the Resources section.)
  + The comprehensive plan should list community gardens as a “goal” within Open Space provisions.
  + At a minimum local zoning ordinances need to recognize community gardens as an “approved use” in land zoned residential, multifamily, industrial, open space, or other appropriate designations.
  + Ordinances should also include basic regulations for community gardens, for instance, to ensure that
    - soil is uncontaminated, and
    - that operating rules are in place.
      * A strong community garden organization comprised of volunteer gardeners and garden leaders should create such operating rules and designate a person to liaise with the city.
    - Other regulations should cover structures on site (a shed for safe tool storage is a must), signage, and the height and materials for fencing.

**Beyond the Basics: Policies That Work**

A “community garden-friendly” local government will implement the following provisions:

* Designation of County and City property for community garden use, with a long-term commitment that allows for perennial plants and trees.
* Use of decommissioned parks for community gardens.
* Incentives to use vacant private land as community gardens, for instance, with lower taxes.
* Access to water for irrigation at city cost.
* Extending to community gardens liability coverage that is currently in effect for parks.
* Facilitation of enhancements to public property that would accommodate use as a garden, for instance, water systems, fences, etc.
* Support for capturing storm water.
* Designated staff liaison to nonprofit community garden organization/garden leaders.
* Use of court-ordered community service workers and inmate laborers.
* Support for educational efforts around gardening and garden leadership.

**Schools Gardens**

Community Garden organizations and local school districts should collaborate to educate children—

perhaps through school-site community gardens— about the value of fresh food and how to grow it.

**Summary**

Community gardens are a cost-effective way for local governments to foster healthy citizens and healthy neighborhoods, to enhance food security, to create greater community resilience, and to beautify neighborhoods.

**Resources**

<http://www.cityofpa.us/PDFs/PermitsPlanning/ComprehensivePlan.pdf>

Comprehensive Plan for the City of Port Angeles

<http://codepublishing.com/WA/ClallamCounty/html/ClallamCounty31/ClallamCounty3102.html#31.02.320>

Clallam County County-wide Comprehensive Plan

<http://www.nplanonline.org/sites/phlpnet.org/files/CommunityGardenPolicy_FINAL_Updated_100608.pdf>

Includes model language for Comprehensive Plans and zoning ordinances for community gardens.

<http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/DisplayPub.aspx?P=MP906>

The University of Missouri Extension’s step-by-step introduction to the process of initiating and maintaining a community garden program. Includes both “philosophical” underpinnings as well as nitty-gritty challenges.

<http://www.cityfarmer.org/>

Urban Agriculture Notes, an extensive website, with numerous pages of “how-to’s” and information sources, by City Farmer, Canada's Office of Urban Agriculture

<http://forums.gardenweb.com/forums/commgard/>

Garden Web’s forum for discussion of all aspects of organizing and participating in community gardens.

<http://extension.missouri.edu/publications/DisplayPub.aspx?P=MP906>

Gardeners’ Welcome Packet, templates for creating written materials that explain how the community garden is organized and how gardeners can participate.

<http://communitygarden.org/>

A wealth of how-to’s, success stories, and links to resources.

<http://communitygarden.org/docs/greening/commgreenrev-00.pdf>

In the American Community Garden Association’s 2000 Fall newsletter an article by Pamela Kirschbaum entitled *Making Policy in a Crowded World: Steps Beyond the Physical Garden.* The author emphasizes the foundational importance of pro-community garden policies: *“*Having clear language about community gardens in a city’s comprehensive plan, as in Seattle and Berkeley, legitimizes such a use of land and overcomes a major obstacle: the perception of community gardening as an interim use, for beautification, until something better emerges.”

<http://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:aeWkVZFPyQ4J:www.community-wealth.org/_pdfs/articles-publications/urban-ag/article-schukoske.pdf+%22+Community+development+through+gardening:+State+and+local+policies+transforming+urban+open+space%22&hl=en&gl=us&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEEShg5TP88_Klio18PoJL4pMBNJsFwCdFcPAP80Zhj_v9PTYpPb-sb7uYeaAAkw_5_-JRGJ5tP62iQpTzz4gSE3ZCT7iKmPeZKnkbb-7HFNYx_rEHUpJ5jWGJLVHscFRMswvno2tY&sig=AHIEtbTgCKVqmK_ZOj3Mbln_rBL7VxNubw>

An article by Professor Jane Schukoske of the University of Baltimore School of Law, “Community Development Through Gardening: State and Local Policies Transforming Urban Open Space” in the *New York University Journal of Legislation and Public Policy*. The article lists a number of “best practices” in land use legislation that favors community gardens. The author contends, “The greater the emphasis on social aspects of gardening such as community development and fair access within communities to environmental resources, the less reasonable are provisions allowing localities to summarily close community gardens.”

<http://tnjn.com/2010/oct/21/food-policy-council-puts-commu/>

An article in the *Tennessee Journalist*, “Food Policy Council Puts Community Garden Outreach on the map” notes that Knoxville has 300 (!) community gardens and quotes a local activist: "Community gardens are about community outreach, not just growing veggies."

<http://www.grist.org/article/food-smart-city-governments-grow-produce-for-the-people/P2>

A web article by the city designer of Davenport, IA, whose main point is: “With unemployment in many cities, food stamp use, and pressure on food banks at an all-time high, it simply makes sense to grow food, not flowers, where possible.” Bainbridge Island; Provo, Utah; and Madison, WI, are among localities foregoing ornamental plantings in public spaces for edible ones.

<http://www.nplanonline.org/nplan/products/establishing-land-use-protections-community-gardens>

*Establishing Land Use Policies for the Protection of Community Gardens*.

“NPLAN (National Policy and Legal Analysis Network), in collaboration with Public Health Law & Policy's [Planning for Healthy Places](http://www.phlpnet.org/healthy-planning) program, has developed a model policy "package" explaining why land use policies are important for supporting and protecting community gardens, and providing model general plan and zoning language to encourage these uses. The language is designed to be tailored to meet individual communities’ needs.”

<http://www.nplanonline.org/sites/phlpnet.org/files/nplan/CommunityGarden_FactSheet_FINAL_091021.pdf>

*Establishing Protections for Community Gardens: A Fact Sheet for Advocates*

Brief suggestions of ways to involve policy makers, directions policies should go.