

Community Gardens Mission Discussion Summary of Ongoing Issues

Given the major changes in community gardens programming in 2014-2015, the City's Community Gardens Committee (CGC) conducted an extensive review of its mission and responsibilities. Our starting point was the [1999 Report](#) by the City of Madison Advisory Committee on Community Gardens, which made over forty recommendations in its Action Plan. The CGC researched the current status of each recommendation, generating a list of those that had been addressed, and those that have not. The goal has been to determine which garden-related entities are in the best position – given their missions, vision and goals – to take responsibility for ongoing issues in three Priority Areas:

1. Land Availability and Security

The City now utilizes a master lease for gardens located in parks, but there is no standard approach for other public lands, or on private land. Strategies for increasing the number of gardens, finding new locations, funding sources, planning and zoning approaches are still needed to make more garden space available.

2. Programmatic Support

In 2012, the City of Madison established its Food Policy Council and created the staff position of City Food Policy Director, and joined the Gardens Network collaboration with Dane County/UW Extension and Community GroundWorks that was established in 2015 after CAC limited its work to pantry gardens. These are very important developments, but there is still a need for other entities, e.g. land trusts, garden groups and fundraising entities, to support community gardens.

3. Improved Garden Infrastructure

The Gardens Network has established an Operations Team that oversees many aspects of community gardens, but there are still questions about sources and delivery of compost, water systems, collection of refuse, and the use of heavy equipment to be resolved.

Other Ongoing Issues

Though not mentioned in the 1999 Report, during the course of its analysis, the CGC identified some additional issues including, but not limited to, grant-writing assistance to garden groups, assessment of ongoing need, monitoring, review, and who oversees progress going forward.

Accomplishments

In the 15 years since the City of Madison Advisory Committee on Community Gardens made its recommendations, much progress has been made.

- Community Gardens Committee was created in 2005.
- Dane County Food Council was created in 2005.
- Madison Food Policy Council was created in 2012.

- Madison Food Policy Director position was created in 2012.
- Gardens Coalition was re-energized in 2015.
- Gardens Network was created in 2015.
- City supports new community gardens on City-owned lands.
- Community Development Authority/Housing supports gardens at its locations.
- Gardens on City-owned lands have 5 year leases, assumed to be renewable.
- Dane County Park & Open Space plan accounts for gardens 2012-2017.
- City's Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code encourage and permit community gardens in residential districts, provide for urban agriculture districts, but can't restrict activities on properties adjacent to gardens.
- Community gardens are routinely included in Neighborhood Development Plans (for areas of the city that will be developed in the future) as well as Neighborhood Plans (that reflect the goals and objectives of existing neighborhoods); a list of over 20 such plans is available.
- City permits planting on public street terraces in residential districts.
- City permits planting of edible landscapes on public lands.
- The Gardens Network is responsible for the kinds of activities envisioned for a "gardens coordinator" in the 1999 recommendations to work with neighborhoods, gardening groups, city departments, and support the development of new gardens.
- City's Food Policy Director serves as the liaison between city departments and the Gardens Network for the community gardens program starting in 2015.
- The Madison Food Policy Council includes representatives from the City's Community Gardens Committee, the Dane County Food Council, and Dane County/UW Extension that all support the efforts of the Gardens Network, has working groups on issues of food access, and makes both policy changes and budget requests.
- Grants for garden projects are available from the New Garden Fund and the Madison Food Policy Council's SEED program.
- Parks Department avoids DNR Stewardship grants for the purchase of additional land because there are significant restrictions that make their use for acquiring garden sites cumbersome; impact fees and parkland dedication strategies may be possible.
- Guidelines and support for garden operations are available from the Gardens Network.
- The City is working with Community GroundWorks on water systems in parks.
- Gardens Network will be collecting demographic and other information on all participating gardens.