



Permaculture Blue Mountains is a not for profit community focused organisation whose objectives include: the creation and support of community gardens in the Blue Mountains region.

Permaculture Blue Mountains (PBM) congratulates the Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC) on this step towards creating a policy which will allow the creation of viable and sustainable community gardens. In particular we welcome the acknowledgment of the potential positive benefits of community gardens in the Blue Mountains to:

- Provide access to local food thus reducing food miles and assisting in addressing food security issues;
Improve the health of the community by providing access to fresh food, and outdoor exercise;
- Foster a sense of community;
- Provide increased opportunity for social connectedness and inter-generational exchange;
- Act as a model for best practice with regard to sustainable gardening; and
- Provide skills development and learning opportunities.

Draft Community Gardens Policy[1]

Permaculture Blue Mountains shares the view that Community Gardens are vital to a more livable City of Blue Mountains. By doing this we respect those with whom we share the planet now and those who inherit the legacy of our current actions.

The two documents which Council is asking for a response to, namely "*Draft Community Gardens Policy*"[1] which we will refer to as the 'Policy' and "*Guidelines for the Establishment of Community Gardens on Council Owned and/ or Managed Lands in the Blue Mountains*"[2] which we'll refer to as the '*Guidelines*' raise a number of important issues about the roles of Council and of Community Gardeners. There are other documents which are important to consider in the context of further developing these documents, in particular the *25 Year City Vision and Map for Action*[3], the *2009 State of City: Blue Mountains* [4] report as well as the more frequently produced State of Environment Reports [5].

In the 2009 State of City: Blue Mountains document it is excellent to see Blue Mountains City Council taking the bold initiative of reporting against social and environmental issues as well as financial ones. It is because BMCC has done this that we as residents of the Blue Mountains are able to help take stock of the results so far.

So far, it's not looking good.

In the 2009 State of City: Blue Mountains report only 15 out of 51 indicators of social and environmental trends are demonstrated to have measurably improved.

In the interest of improving some of these areas, it is worth exploring factors that can not only enable, but encourage the formation of new community gardens within everyone's reach, as well as help to ensure that they are a sustainable asset for visitors and generations of mountain dwellers and visitors to come.

Before talking about community garden policy in detail it is worth noting that Permaculture Blue Mountains recognises that unused land can be put to a variety of uses aside from community gardens many of which transform a current liability into an asset for the City. In Permaculture practice we "*design for*" outcomes rather than "*react to*" circumstances. We see the establishment of a policy as part of this designing process, and well within the current strategic directions of current BMCC vision and action plans.

Beyond the scope of this submission, Permaculture Blue Mountains invites the Blue Mountains City Council policy makers to produce a revised Policy and Guidelines in collaboration with appropriate stakeholders with the objective of creating the best community outcomes possible for BMCC's strategic contexts, as well as the land and the people they support.

BMCC currently has a requirement to manage various lands in the public interest, but the resources available for upkeep are limited.

In general Permaculture Blue Mountains believes that Community Gardens can be created and sustainably maintained for the good of the community including to help reverse negative trends in future State of the City reports. On the face of it, there are many similarities between BMCC's Draft Policy [2] and that of City of Sydney [6]. However despite their similarities in intention, it can be seen that there is some work still to be done to clarify objectives of the policy as well as the intended outcomes which BMCC, PBM and community gardeners and others can actively work towards. This is why PBM applauds the foresight of City of Sydney in adopting its recent Community Gardens Policy which outlines a clear vision for the place of community gardens within its strategic context and how it connects with relevant policies. This has a greater chance of achieving tangible social and environmental, as well as financial benefits for BMCC and the residents of the Blue Mountains.

As Blue Mountains residents living in a World Heritage Region we believe that it is in all our interests to be leaders in provisions for Community Gardens, as we believe that it is our responsibility to lead the way in demonstrating whole of government sustainable living policies which make tangible

and positive differences to residents lives and to the state of the city and the environment. In a community garden sustainability is not longer a chore, but a joy. If we are smart we can look at best practice here and across the world, and use these experiences to extend beneficial outcomes across the mountains.

In a spirit of open collaboration with the health and well being of our City and its inhabitants, Permaculture Blue Mountains submit the following recommendations to be directly reflected in revised Policy and Guidelines documents.

That Blue Mountains City Council becomes an effective enabler so that the community may more easily create community gardens in the Blue Mountains. To do this the policy should include in specific detail

- what BMCC's role is in relation to the community garden groups and what it will provide in terms of facilitation and support services, and
- the roles, rights and responsibilities of the community garden groups

The current policy draft does not outline this in enough specific detail, and could be better presented. The City of Sydney Policy [6] provides good starting reference in this area.

That BMCC produce a community gardens Policy and Guidelines which clarify the process of starting a community garden not only for clearing up any internal confusion, but which are also designed to be easy to use for the potential community gardeners. An easy to read flow chart which includes the title of the particular officer responsible for that part of the process, as well as a reasonable timeline outlined for each part of the start up process.

That BMCC take an proactive approach in facilitating the creation of community gardens in the Blue Mountains.

That BMCC actively engage in mapping potential community garden sites.

This would include clearly identifying public land managed by Council which is available for use by the public whether under licence, lease or other arrangement within the Guidelines.

That accessibility to community gardens within reasonable walking distances/ easily accessed via public transport access points be reported against as part of BMCC's commitment to social equity in the Blue Mountains.

That the LEP or other appropriate provision allow for the flexible integration of mixed use community spaces, which is currently not allowed in any circumstances in the LEP as it stands (for example in large sporting grounds community garden spaces would not be allowed)

In line with being a 'City of the Arts', that BMCC make provision for continuing support for arts as a valid activity within community gardens in its written policies.

Acknowledging food security as well as food related well being issues, that BMCC extend its policies relating to community gardens to specifically include Community Food Gardens, Verge Gardens, Street Orchards (such as Sustainability St), School Kitchen Gardens, Food Forests and City Farms, all community gardens whose primary objective is the provision of food. Some definitions that could be of use here include

- community gardens with a mixture of allotments for each member and some shared areas;
- communal gardens where the entire garden is managed collectively. Some examples of communal gardens are food forests (which include structured layers of plants such as edible groundcovers, shrubs and trees);
- verge gardens are where garden beds are established on the nature strip. These are considered a type of community garden when they are managed collectively by a group of local residents and decisions are made jointly.
- school kitchen garden projects are defined as a community garden when local residents outside of the school community can join the garden and manage the garden in partnership with the school. In this model, the garden may include individual plots for residents and communal garden beds that the school can manage and use for lessons on cooking, nutrition and the environment and provide produce for the school canteen. School kitchen gardens aren't always set up as community gardens due to perceived problems with access and security for people outside of the school community;
- Community gardens on public housing land usually contain a mixture of plots and common areas.

That any final Policy and Guidelines include provision for the distribution of small grants to community gardens starting out. Consideration may be given for gardens benefiting those on low incomes or income support, or for example where there is some other immediate tangible benefit identified to the community.

That the clause regarding time frame be reconsidered to provide better security of tenure for community gardens. We feel that 5 years is not sufficient time period for any garden particularly when the planting of trees is considered. A longer time frame pays respect the contribution made by long lived trees and the acknowledgment of all the ecosystems involved which positively contribute to a sustainable City of Blue Mountains urban landscape. If there is concern regarding ongoing community commitment to the garden, then a trial period might be more suitable for inclusion in this policy. Such an amendment would not remove the possibility of regular reviews nor discount the responsibilities on the community gardens licence or lease holder/s as may be outlined elsewhere in the Guidelines.

That BMCC make provision to consider umbrella insurance for Community Garden groups starting out, particularly during a trial period (see previous recommendation). This is likely to be a small investment which could be a big enabler to get groups active, keeping the momentum of interest into motivation of physically organizing and establishing a garden, particularly if the group is ready to work but not quite ready for the paperwork.

That the LEP definition of Permaculture be removed from the Guidelines[2, p7] as it is neither correct nor placed appropriately in the document
'Permaculture means the use of residential or recreational land to grow fruit, vegetables and herbs using closed systems which are designed to replicate the diversity, stability and resilience of natural ecosystems, for non-commercial purposes, but does not include the planting or propagation of any plant listed within the schedule entitled "Weeds of the Blue Mountains" in the Council's Better Living DCP.'

That BMCC more accurately define permaculture as a design system for sustainable living rather than refer to it as a gardening activity. PBM is happy to provide advice to BMCC on this matter should any further clarification be required.

That when Permaculture is referred to in the policy document it refers to more widely acknowledged and commonly accepted definitions as shown below and included in any glossary or dictionary of terms or appendices.

- *Permaculture is an approach to designing human settlements and agricultural systems that mimic the relationships found in natural ecologies.*

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Permaculture>

- *Any system of sustainable agriculture that renews natural resources and enriches local ecosystems; The design, installation and maintenance of indefinitely sustainable human communities set in balanced ecologies, both urban and rural*

<http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/permaculture>

That there be no strict definitions for activities that may or may not take place within gardens, since there are sufficient laws in place to describe what may or may not be done in public places or within LEP guidelines or other advisories.

That to facilitate urban agriculture and community gardening within the Blue Mountains, BMCC include appropriate provision in BMCC's Local Environment Plan (LEP) at the earliest available opportunity, for community gardens as exempt development, provided that applicants go through the application process for new gardens as outlined in its forthcoming Policy and Guidelines. Common elements of a community garden such as rainwater tanks, fences and solar photovoltaic systems should also be listed as exempt development.

That in the interests of transparency, all lease agreements or licences for community gardens are held on the Public Record, and available for viewing via the BMCC's Website.

That community gardens be listed along side other public community facilities in the BMCC's website and other publications as a matter of course.

That a single liaison at Council be established for community garden groups, ideally this would be a community gardens co-ordinator, whether this be a responsibility within an existing role, or a new position be created to fully facilitate the potential of community gardens.

That the policy outlines a separate category to cover community food gardens as a separate sub category within community gardens, where a community garden can include a community food garden, as well as allow for the establishment of designated community food gardens in other public spaces.

That the policy provides of a set of recommended community group governance guides to assist communities in the successful creation of new groups to establish community gardens and these guidelines be made available on line.

That the BMCC include a category for food security as one of its key indicators in the City of Blue Mountains Management Plan. This would facilitate the implementation of future community food gardens specifically, and also allow accurate progress on the success of all community food ventures, including community food gardens, to be measured in the councils State of the City reporting.

In summary, Permaculture Blue Mountains and Blue Mountains Community Gardens welcome initiatives by Blue Mountains City Council to enable further development and growth of Community Gardens in the Blue Mountains.

We offer recommendations for the Council to undertake concrete action in promoting and sustaining community gardens.

Please contact Kat Szuminska from PBM to further discuss this submission and matters arising from it.

Kat Szuminska
katska@gmail.com
cc: info@permaculturebluemountains.net

Links to Document References and further reading:

- [1] [Draft Community Gardens Policy 2010](#)
- [2] [Guidelines for the Establishment of Community Gardens on Council Owned and/ or Managed Lands in the Blue Mountains](#)
- [3] [25 Year City Vision and Map for Action](#)
- [4] [2009 State of City: Blue Mountains](#)
- [5] [2009-10 State of Environment Report](#)
- [6] [City of Sydney Community Gardens Policy](#)

Community Gardens Policies

[Marrickville Community Gardens Policy](#)

[Sunshine Coast Community Gardens Policy](#)

download Woollahra Community Gardens Policy - at

http://www.woollahra.nsw.gov.au/services/parks/community_gardens

Developing a Community Gardens Policy Collaboratively

<http://www.leichhardt.nsw.gov.au/Community-Gardens.html>

Research from Griffith University

provide a positive environment sharing information about food and neutral environment for learning.

<http://www.griffith.edu.au/health/school-public-health/research/nutrition-garden>

UNSW research

The Role of Community Gardens in Sustaining Healthy Communities -

Susan Thompson, Linda Corkery and Bruce Judd

Faculty of the Built Environment, UNSW, Sydney, NSW, Australia

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.fbe.unsw.edu.au%2Fcityfutures%2FSOAC%2Ftheroleofcommunitygardens.pdf>