Community Garden Design and Consultation

Background
In the fall of 2015 a group of community members working with the Oaklands Community Association (OCA) began exploring the possibility of creating a community garden in Oaklands. An initial survey showed significant support for a community garden in Oaklands and attracted a group of volunteers to lead the project. Over the past year and a half the volunteer team, with staff and in-kind resource support from the OCA, has carried out a public consultation process to solicit ideas on the type of garden desired, the location, and the design. Oaklands Park was selected as the site and a mixed garden model was chosen. We will soon be presenting our proposal to City with the hope that we can break ground by January of 2018.

Vision and Values
The garden will...
- be beautiful and enjoyed by community members and adjacent residents
- promote local food production and food security
- provide new and returning gardeners with ‘a plot of their own’
- include space to grow food for those in need, for those who stop by, and for members.
- be a gathering and meeting place; co-operative, inclusive, friendly, respectful and fun
- be a place where we can share and advance our horticultural knowledge
- encourage pollinator populations by providing habitat and connection to the greater ecosystem
- be an inviting and creative space for children and families to play and experience nature’s bounty
- provide a nurturing environment for children to learn food-growing as a life skill

Community Benefits, Education, and Partnerships
An outdoor classroom space will be open for use by local schools and colleges, and for gardening workshops and gatherings.

A portion of harvests from communal beds will go to community based organizations such as Cool Aid and the Cridge, as well as the Oaklands Community Dinners.

The garden is designed with accessibility in mind, and partnerships will be sought with local senior’ facilities to allow residents to visit and participate in the garden and in intergenerational programming.

Partnerships will be sought with local intercultural associations to facilitate cross-cultural learning and sharing of food-growing practices.
Governance

The garden will operate under a contract between the City of Victoria, the OCA and members of the community garden team. The management and administration of the Oaklands community garden will be provided by a leadership committee of gardeners and the OCA Community Development Coordinator, who reports to the executive director of the Oaklands Community Association.

Members of the garden leadership committee will be nominated or self-select annually at the garden annual general meeting and will have leadership responsibility for a number of functions. All members, including allotment-holders and non-allotment-holders, will be required to contribute to the upkeep of communal areas and commons.

A budget including projected income, expenditures and contingencies will be prepared for review and approval at the garden AGM. Income sourced from fundraising and from grants will be allocated by a nominated site manager, subject to approval by garden leadership committee. All community garden members will be welcome to review the garden finances at any time.

Garden Design and Installation

Site

The Oaklands Park - on the 1500 and 1600 block of Ryan Street between Victor and Scott streets - has a playground, outdoor gym stations, a walking and cycling greenway, ball diamond, soccer field, tennis courts, street hockey court, and bathroom. The community garden is proposed for the area between the ball diamond and the playground, as well as for the adjacent space across the greenway—as marked in Figure 1 in yellow (opposite).

The site slopes slightly downwards to the south and to the east. In winter all of the ground is soggy, with standing water in the southwest corner and east end (before the paved path). This drainage problem appears to have been exacerbated by the installation of the paved greenway.

A variety of stately trees border the site to the north, and southeast (some Garry Oaks, some other). Of primary concern in the design are the trees on neighbours’ lots to the west.

Neighbouring properties have chain-link fences of varying heights that allow views into the park, some with gates, some with screening shrubs/trees.

*Figure 1: Oaklands Park, north end*
Oaklands Park Current Uses

- The playground is regularly used by families with young children as well as elementary-school children from Oaklands Elementary School and the Victoria School for Ideal Education.
- A paved city greenway runs N-S through the park, so there is a steady stream of walkers and cyclists through the park particularly in summer.
- The fields are used periodically for little league baseball, and soccer, as well as an off-leash dog area (though this is technically not allowed). Further south there is a bathroom, tennis courts and a street hockey space.
- The space proposed for the garden is not usable in winter and early spring because of the mud.
- None of the park is lit at night and so sees little nighttime use.
- From time to time, one or two people that appear to be homeless with shopping carts seem to be based next to the bathroom.
- Crime, drug-use, and other illicit activities have not been noted by the neighbours.

During the drier months, the proposed garden site is used:

- occasionally as an area to throw a ball etc within view of parents who are supervising younger children in the playground. One neighbour noted that this space is preferred over the ball and soccer field because those are wet in the summer due to overwatering.
- as a shortcut to get from the playground to the bathroom.
- by dog owners as a path to get to the field which is sometimes used as an off-leash area.

The area to the east of the greenway is not used regularly. Two neighbours have gates opening onto the park.
Proposed Design

Summary

A wheelchair accessible path will form a loop between the current paved greenway, the garden, and the sidewalk around the playground, to encourage walkers to ‘take a detour’ through the garden. The garden will have an ‘enchanted garden’ theme, with public art and playscapes intended to tickle the imagination and draw children in.

The main part of the garden will have deer fencing, with unlocked gates, and covers 0.28 acres. Within the fence, 35% of the planting area will be private allotments, 40% will be communal beds maintained and harvested by garden members (including members with and without allotments) for their use and for donation to families in need, and 25% will be commons which may be picked by anyone passing by. There will be 35 allotments of 4ft x 8ft each, with 8 that are built with accessibility in mind and a wheelchair accessible surface.

The commons will consist primarily of a food forest that includes fruit trees, bushes, and vines, herbs, and edible perennials. It will also include some beds with salad veggies and cut flowers. Entryways and paths will be lined with flowers for people and pollinators to enjoy. Educational signage will help visitors know what to pick and how.

There will also be an outdoor classroom space that is available to be used by local schools and colleges, and for gardening workshops and gatherings.

Outside the deer fence will be an animal sculpture made of living willow, forming a tunnel that children can play in. Excess water from the site will be channelled into a rain garden to help with current winter drainage issues. A drinking fountain will drain, via a rill that children can play with, into the rain garden.

East of the greenway there will be a small labyrinth made of lavender, with a bench in the middle, for meditators and children to enjoy.
Figure 2: Proposed Design
Key Considerations and Proposed Permanent Features

Mixed Model

- At least a quarter of the space within the main garden will be a common area open to harvesting by anyone passing through the garden. The public will be encouraged to ‘leave plenty for others’.
- The remainder of the main garden will be a mix of allotments, and communal plots for harvest by garden members. A portion of communal harvests will be given to local charities.
- Outside the deer fence there will be several feature gardens for the public to enjoy (living tunnel, lavender labyrinth, rain garden).

Security

- The entire garden will be open to the public at all times (with the exception of the locked shed).
- Sightlines throughout the garden to prevent unwanted activities.
- There will be multiple entrances (5) to help with sense of security.
- Paths and open spaces will not be wide enough for camping; Congregation spaces will be comfortable for sitting but not sleeping.
- No electricity currently. Medium to long-term goal is the installation of some solar lighting.

Main Paths

Main garden paths are wheelchair accessible (eg crushed gravel or paved, >1.3m wide). Wheelchair accessible raised beds have wide paths of crushed gravel.

Perimeter

The main garden will have a deer fence that will be designed to last at least 20 years, either PVC-coated steel or tension wire mesh (decorated for beauty eg woven willow art). Poles will be metal or wood. The perimeter will be raised using cinder blocks.

Shed

The shed will be locked, with member-access only. It will be located to avoid shading out garden area and central in order to maintain sightlines. To maximize space, most of the building will be outside the deer fence. The shed will have a creative design in keeping with the enchanted garden theme (such as a giant mushroom) and be constructed of a sculptable material such as cobb or ferrocement and will include play features such as sculpted benches, climbing nooks, arches. The shed will be built to discourage rats, squirrels and raccoons.
Trees
Fruit and nut trees will form the foundation of the food forest that will line the north edge of the garden. Tree heights will vary but not exceed semi-dwarf (15 feet).

Drainage
A drainage line will be dug from the highest point in the garden (northwest corner) towards the east in order to channel excess water to the rain garden.

Rain Garden
A rain garden, to accept excess water from the site, will be located in the place that currently has standing water in winter/spring. The size and construction of the rain garden needs to be determined in consultation with the City and experts. Plantings are yet to be determined, but will need to be deer-proof and will likely be a combination of native plants, berry bushes, and plants that would fit into the ‘enchanted garden’ theme (such as giant Gunnera). It would be nice if plantings could continue to be welcoming to migrating ducks in winter.

Drinking Fountain and Water Play
Our design includes for a drinking fountain next to the greenway. The water will be drained into the rain garden via a shallow open channel (a ‘rill’) that children can play with providing a safe opportunity for water play while also giving the rain garden a water source during the dry summer months. The drinking fountain will incorporate the ‘enchanted garden’ theme and ideally have a tap that could attach to a garden hose for periodic watering the lavender labyrinth.

Other Features and Considerations (may change as the design evolves)

Garden Beds
- 35 allotment beds —on average 4 ft x 8 ft—in order to maximize access and membership, given the garden’s urban location.
- Uniformity of the beds is important to keeping the garden looking tidy which is important for this centrally-located park.
- Raised beds help with drainage (important for this site!), avoid soil compaction from walking on beds, and help delineate gardens from paths (thus maximizing limited space).
- Because materials and soil are costly, the highest raised beds should be reserved for the wettest areas and for wheelchair accessible beds. For wheelchair accessible beds, half are 3 ft high, half are 2 ft high (following recommendations from the Vancouver’s...
Community Gardens Accessibility Guidelines). For regular beds: half are 1 foot high, half are 2 feet high. We are not planning wheel-under beds as we received advice from the Gorge Community Gardens that this design was too prone to drying out in summer.

- Due to the expense and effort of building beds, we are planning to use materials that will last 20+ years. Typical wood planks require replacement about every 7 years; recycled plastic lumber lasts much longer (but is more expensive), but can be combined with galvanized steel to reduce total cost. These are planned for all allotments and communal beds (see figure 3 above).

- If funding or labour is insufficient, commons beds could instead be mounded or raised using scavenged materials (e.g., driftwood, stones) as edging.

- Most allotments will be keyhole-shaped to maximize growing space. To reduce conflict between neighbours, there will be communal space designated between each allotment bed that is planned with shading in mind—for example communal beds that will be shaded by adjacent allotments will be planted with cool-loving crops.

- To reduce expenditure on topsoil and boost organic material and drainage, the bottom of raised beds will be filled with wood waste (stumps, branches, chips) following 'hugelkulture' practice.

**Commons**

- Commons are open to public harvesting and will be maintained by volunteers and allotment gardeners as a part of their obligations

- Fruit and nut trees under-planted with useful bushes, vines, and plants. Lots of berries for people to pluck.

- Trees planted at north perimeter to avoid shading beds. Mix of semi-dwarf (15 ft) and smaller sizes.

- Keyhole-shaped beds where possible to maximize growing space. Paths somewhat random and unpredictable to make the garden fun to explore.

- Includes some beds with salad greens and herbs, and cutflowers
Scented and touch gardens for the visually impaired

Commons are located in one clearly-labelled quadrant to avoid confusion with allotments and communal beds

Ferrocement is a building material where a mix of cement and sand is layered onto a wire mesh, resulting in very thin and strong concrete. Ferrocement raised beds are relatively cheap, durable and can be curved (but are labour intensive). These are planned for all beds in the commons (see photo opposite).

Perimeter and entrances

- Will be well-maintained and planted with an aesthetic focus so will include flowers/pollinators.
- Some areas will have cane fruits (eg raspberry, domestic blackberry) trained in arches along edges—planted inside (to avoid deer eating spring shoots) but pickable from outside (commons).
- Main entrances will have arbor covered with plants (eg kiwi, wisteria, roses), or ‘living arch’ from trained plants.
- The gates along the ‘loop’ path (north and east gates) will be handmade beautiful gates, others will be standard gates.
- At the north entrance, there a kids gate for children to use.
- All gates will be self-closing.

Other Paths

- Smaller paths between beds will be woodchip.
- No grass within the garden, to avoid mowing/encroachment.

Compost

- Composting is important for soil-building.
- Compost bins in multiple locations for easier access.
- Will have a separate ‘Green cone’ for any food scraps, to discourage rats.
Public Spaces and Art

- A ‘classroom’ area for teaching and gathering, possibly sheltered, possibly with a stage. There are two elementary schools within a block (one of which teaches permaculture) that will be encouraged to use the garden. It will also be a space for gardening workshops. It has been located in afternoon-shaded area, to maximize growing areas.

- Solo seats throughout the garden for peaceful reflection, and several places with two or more benches for socializing

- The centre of the garden (where paths meet) will have a public art piece that is inviting for children.

- Whimsical features throughout the garden such as a special children’s gate (child-sized), with hopscotch pavers leading to it; a toadstool table and chairs; sculpted faces peaking out of the ferrocement beds; a butterfly bench.

Lavender Labyrinth

Outside the deer fence, in the area located to the east of the pedestrian/bike greenway, we will install a labyrinth planted with lavender. The labyrinth will provide a contemplative opportunity for meditators (including walkers passing through on the greenway), and a fun place for the children to explore. Lavender is also deer-proof, durable, a favourite with pollinators, and wonderfully scented. A portion could be harvested and dried to sell as a garden fundraiser.

Because the soil is wet in winter, the labyrinth beds will be raised using curved ferrocement, and planted with a few varieties of lavender to extend the bloom time. There will be a bench in the middle. Paths will be woodchip and located to avoid blocking adjacent neighbours’ gates. For security reasons the labyrinth will have two exits.
Living Sculpture

The area at the east end of the site is challenging due to its poor drainage in winter. Both willow and redtwig dogwood thrive in such conditions. Pliable branches can be inserted into the ground and will sprout, allowing construction of living tunnels or sculptures with future growth woven in to reinforce the structure. We plan to plant one or more for children to play in. They will be based in woodchips so will not require mowing.

Notice board at entrance

- Current information about the garden, volunteer opportunities, and what can be harvested
- Coated with an anti-graffiti spray that allows for easy washing.

Signage throughout the garden

- Clearly delineating commons from allotments.
- In common areas, educational information on what is planted, how/when to harvest and reminders to ‘leave plenty for others’.

Pest control

- To discourage rats, no food products into main compost bins.
- Shed will be designed to be rat, squirrel, and racoon-proof.
- Pest-control will be included in the yearly maintenance budget.

Visually Impaired

Elements for the visually impaired including scented and tactile plants, and white flowers.
Project Phases
We envision the primary garden construction will occur in three phases over a three year period.

YEAR 1:
- Install drainage, main paths, wheelchair accessible quadrant
- Construct shed, deer fence, perimeter raised bed wall, arbours and custom gates
- Build and plant allotments and any communal beds that aren’t ferrocement
- Spread woodchips on minor paths
- Build and plant flower beds along east perimeter fence
- Commons will remain temporarily as lawn. No development outside fence yet.

YEAR 2:
- Build commons beds (ferrocement or other raised bed)
- Build/install benches and public art
- Install educational signage
- No development outside fence yet

YEAR 3:
- Install rain garden and drinking fountain
- Install teaching area
- Install living tunnel/sculpture
- Install and plant lavender labyrinth

Process for Further Design
Many elements of our design will evolve over time, particularly over the coming three years. We plan to continue soliciting feedback on the proposed design from the public over the summer at the Sunset Markets. In addition to general input, we will be seeking specific input on:

- A name for the community garden
- Design for the shed and accompanying play structures
- Type of deer fencing and decoration
- Designs for the entry arches

We will continue to liaise with specialized groups and individuals (such as master gardeners, landscape architects, carpentry students) for advice on the layout of allotments, materials for and construction of the raised beds, drainage solutions, and design of communal beds and food forest.

In the subsequent years will seek public input on:

- design and layout of the commons
- preferred types of fruit/food to plant
- public art and benches
- shape for the living sculpture
- design for drinking fountain and water play feature

We hope to engage the local schoolchildren in these designs, possibly holding a competition for ideas for various elements. We also hope to engage local artists and college students in the process.

Summary of Community Consultation To Date
Extensive public consultation has been ongoing since the fall of 2015 and asked for input on site selection, the type of garden, and design ideas. It included both the broader Oaklands community including park users, as well as neighbours adjacent to the site. Feedback has generally been enthusiastic and positive, though there has been a small number of people opposed or with concerns.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
<td>Online survey #1 to OCA email list, 24 survey respondents. Solicited suggestions for potential sites.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 2015</td>
<td>Community walkabout of potential sites</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2016</td>
<td>First meeting of the Community Garden Initiative, team is formed</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td>Display at Oaklands Street Party, began handing out paper and electronic survey #2</td>
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<tr>
<td>June-July 2016</td>
<td>Weekly display at Sunset market, handing out paper and electronic survey #2, and sticker vote on garden site. Survey also distributed online (email, facebook). Survey had 121 respondents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2016</td>
<td>Weekly display at Sunset market, showing survey results re site choice, sticky pad ideas board and sticker vote on favourite features</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 13, 2016</td>
<td>Community Garden Planning Workshop with guest experts invited from other community gardens, advertised through the Oaklands E-Newsletter and emailed invitations to all survey respondents expressing interest, and posted on outdoor signboard</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 8, 2017</td>
<td>Community Garden Design Session, invitations</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 20th &amp; 17th, 2017</td>
<td>Door-knocking at all households bordering the Oaklands Park, delivering letter and invitation to February Open.</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 5th, 2017</td>
<td>Community Garden Open House showcasing preliminary design, advertised in OCA e-news and on outdoor signboard, posters, &amp; e-invitation to garden mailing list</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 15th, 2017</td>
<td>Pop-up information booth at the Oaklands Park showcasing refined design. Door-knocking at properties adjacent to proposed labyrinth.</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 8th, 2017</td>
<td>Community Garden Public Consultation at the Oaklands Park, with letter invitations (including design) to all households bordering the park, e-list invitation, and posters throughout community</td>
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See Appendix 5 for details of early consultation.