

Best Practices for Community Gardens in North Saint Paul

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Best Practices and Case Studies
for Community Gardens in North Saint Paul, MN
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ABSTRACT

The City of North Saint Paul is looking for ways to promote environmentally conscious projects and create options for healthy lifestyles. Recently, community members have shown an interest in developing community gardens. The City recognizes the benefits community gardens can provide citizen, such as building a sense of community, increasing food security, and improving the overall health and wellness of residents.

Study Purpose

The purpose of our report is to assist the City with a compilation of best practices from significant case study examples. These examples will inform North Saint Paul's approach in developing policies and processes for community gardens. The best practices selected focus on four main aspects of developing a community garden: initial organization, selecting an appropriate site, management and maintenance, and developing ongoing partnerships and programs to support community gardening.

Study Process

These best practices were selected from successful cities, plans, and programs in similar contexts to North Saint Paul and highlight the tools and strategies that will assist the residents of North Saint Paul with the organization, design, construction, and ongoing processes for this valuable neighborhood asset. While every community has different needs and contexts, we feel that these practices are adaptable to North Saint Paul in laying out a foundation for a sustainable community garden system.

Conclusions

We hope that these best practices will inform the policies and processes for organizing, maintaining, and promoting an on-going network for community gardening in North Saint Paul. With the success of the existing community garden, Cowern Community Garden, along with the support of the City in creating a framework to support future community gardens, this will generate a valuable neighborhood asset and foster a greater sense of community in North Saint Paul. We feel that these best practices are applicable and adaptable to the goals of the City in promoting a sustainable and healthy environment for its residents.



Source: Madeline Leslie



Source: Madeline Leslie



Source: Madeline Leslie



Source: www.motheearthnews.com

II. MANAGEMENT PRACTICES FOR A COMMUNITY GARDEN

11. Promote conservation water use and equitable access (South St. Paul, MN)
12. Management styles of the garden (New York City, NY)
13. Application and education about approved fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides (Menomonie Community Garden, WI)
14. Include method to transfer knowledge (Malawi Dairy Development Alliance)
15. Establish maintenance practices for common areas and individual plots (Montgomery Parks Community Gardens Program)
16. Establish standards for on-site composting (Bellingham, WA)
17. Mitigate against negative externalities of new structures (Richmond, VA)

Establish standards for on-site composting

Description – Composting plant material from garden plots is an excellent way to both dispose of plant debris at the end of the growing season and to create a free source of organic matter for incorporation into garden beds. However, composting that is done incorrectly can be a nuisance to garden neighbors and those working in nearby plots. Individual compost bins must be 3' by 3' by 3' to create enough heat to effectively break down plant material, kill weed seeds, and reduce the smell given off by rotting organic matter. It is important to allow individuals to create and maintain compost bins within the confines of their own plots, it is also necessary to provide space for gardeners to deposit excess and diseased plant material that will be properly disposed of by the municipality that owns the property.

Context – Bellingham City Parks and Recreation Department operates three community gardens on park-owned land. The department provides a communal location for gardeners to put plant debris from their own garden plots, and does not allow people to deposit household waste in the compost pile. Weeds must be placed in a designated area where they will be removed by staff from the parks department. While individuals are not required to maintain a compost pile in their own plots, they are allowed to do so, provided that the plant material remains completely within the boundaries of their own plots and does not intrude upon the space or use of the garden by others.

Relevance – While Bellingham is located in a different geographical region with different environmental conditions than North Saint Paul, their regulations are relevant. Plant debris from garden plots is something that will need to be dealt with, no matter where the garden is located. Usually the quantity of debris created by an individual plot is too much to be composted on-site, and thus a communal compost pile is helpful. Once adequately broken down, the compost can then be re-incorporated into the plots, improving the quality of the soil without using synthetic fertilizers. Additionally, the provision of a separate space for weedy plants that will be disposed of off-site is highly recommended, as this will help prevent the accidental reintroduction of weed seeds into garden plots via the addition of poorly-composted plant material.

I. PREPARATION AND SELECTION OF A COMMUNITY GARDEN

1. Create an informational website for community gardens (Minneapolis, MN)
2. Involve intended consumers in decision making and planning (Hollygrove Market and Farm, New Orleans)
3. Create rules for community gardening participants (Dowling Community Garden, Minneapolis, MN)
4. Provide city funding for community gardens (Madison, WI)
5. Research potential site locations to ensure consumer feasibility (Twin Cities Community Start up Guide)
6. Conduct asset based community development (Denver, CO)
7. Create an urban agriculture plan (Baltimore, MD)
8. Regulate community gardens in zoning code (Minneapolis, MN)
9. Designate city-owned land for community garden use (Richmond, VA)
10. Create program highlighting vacant lots as potential garden sites (Savannah, GA)



Source: Madeline Leslie



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Regulate Community Gardens in Zoning Code

Description – By including community gardens in North Saint Paul's Zoning Ordinance, the City can provide legitimacy to the practice. The City's Zoning Ordinance should use language that provides that community gardens are an approved land use in appropriate zoning districts. This will allow citizens to develop community gardens without obtaining a permit or variance and provide clarification on the rules surrounding the use of community gardens. Supporting community gardens in zoning regulations is one of the key land use protections for community gardens outlined in the document Land Use Protections for Community Gardens by Public Health Law and Policy, a nonprofit organization funded by the California Department of Public Health which provides legal information on public health issues.

Context – The City of Minneapolis recently amended their zoning code to allow community gardens in several zoning districts as either a principle or accessory use. This includes all residential and commercial districts. This gives residents the freedom to fit small plots into lots that are being used for housing, retail, or other purposes or to devote entire vacant lots to larger gardens. The zoning code also requires that overhead lighting be provided, limits the number of vehicles that may be parked on the site, prohibits retail sales on the site, limits where gardens may be located, and prohibits the keeping of animals. These regulations are designed to help keep community gardens safe and ensure that they do not turn into a nuisance.

Relevance – Adding language to support community gardens would be appropriate in all residential districts. If businesses wish to participate in the community garden programs, gardens can also be allowed in the Business Districts. The City should conduct an outreach effort to identify community members' concerns about community gardens. Specific regulations should be based on these concerns, but will likely involve limiting the keeping of animals and regulating parking.

III. LOGISTICS AND NETWORK FOR SUPPORTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN

18. Use portions of the produce to close the food disparity gap (South Central Farm, Los Angeles)
19. Donate food to local food shelves through a produce donation program (Fridley church and Anoka County, MN)
20. Create a community commercial kitchen (Clinton, MN)
21. Marketing produce through the farm to school program (Hopkins, MN)
22. Create education activities for youth (Madison, WI)
23. Sell produce from community gardens at a local farmers market (Mahtomedi, MN)
24. Sell produce at local restaurants (Western Sustainability Exchange)
25. Involve universities and students (Portland, OR)



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