

# COMMUNITY GARDENS IN SANTA MARIA

Benefits of community gardens and procedures for their implementation



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this companion document to the staff report is to introduce the use of community gardens as a meaningful way to produce food, grow community, maintain food security and support local economies. Cities across the nation have begun to recognize the importance of urban agriculture and have started implementing policies and programs to preserve the long term use of community gardens.

Our food sources have become impacted by highly processed, packaged, and cheap food that contributes to an unprecedented amount of health consequences triggered from being overweight or obese. Understanding where food comes from and how it's produced can significantly contribute to the health and nutrition of a population. Education will help people understand that food doesn't grow on grocery store shelves or in a cardboard box. The best way to teach this concept is through local agriculture, such as community gardens. This report will highlight some of the benefits of community gardens, as well different types, challenges and steps needed to start a garden.

In order to start building a healthy community, the City of Santa Maria will need to include goals, policies and actions in the 2011 General Plan Update that will address community health through local food production. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission approve to amend the City of Santa Maria's Zoning Code to include the use of community gardens which will help implement these goals. The staff report will identify precisely how community gardens will be incorporated into the Zoning Code, including the zoning districts in which they will be permitted and conditionally permitted, development standards and rules of operation for community gardens.



“  
*Flowers grow in flower gardens, Vegetables  
grow in vegetable gardens, & people grow in  
community gardens*”

-Auckland City Gardens Policy, 2002

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## **INTRODUCTION**

During fall 2010 and winter 2011, the Community Planning Laboratory within the City and Regional Planning Department at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo created a Community Profile and updated the General Plan for the City of Santa Maria. Building healthy communities through land use and the built environment was a major focus of this General Plan Update. The following report was completed to implement one of the policies stated in the Community Services and Infrastructure Element.

As an attachment to the Staff Report, the primary purpose of this document is to analyze the types, benefits and challenges of community gardens. The Staff Report recommends approval from the planning commission to amend the Santa Maria Zoning Code to permit the use of community gardens in the residential, commercial, public facilities and open space districts. This document also addresses recent health statistics for the nation, state and county level; as well as how cities around the nation have implemented community garden policies to create healthy communities. With the use community gardens, Santa Maria has an opportunity to build community, create jobs and revenue, and improve neighborhood access to affordable, healthy and fresh food.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**



Currently, the City of Santa Maria does not address the use of community gardens in any of its policy documents, laws or regulations. Barriers such as liability expenses, code restrictions and a lack of resources can make it difficult for residents of Santa Maria to start new community gardens. The single existing community garden located in the Public Facilities (PF) zone at Alice Trefts Park in Santa Maria is considered to be an accessory use of the Elwin Mussel Senior Center. The Alice Trefts Community Garden consists of 100 individual garden plots that can be reserved by

community members through the Recreation and Parks Department. The garden has provided residents from all cultures and ethnicities, the opportunity to grow fresh produce and strengthen community bonds. Members have the option of purchasing a plot for a year or leasing a plot for 6 months. The long waitlist at the Alice Trefts Community garden illustrates the heightened demand from residents to create more community gardens in other neighborhoods; therefore policies should be implemented to support the use of community gardens in Santa Maria.

## COMMUNITY INPUT

The Cal Poly Community Planning Laboratory conducted community outreach in Santa Maria during fall 2010 and winter 2011. These surveys and workshops revealed that most Santa Maria residents wanted better access to nutritional foods. This included more community gardens and expanded hours/days for the Santa Maria Farmers Market. Most of the concerns from residents about the existing community garden included the lack of communication between city staff and local growers, limited policy enforcement, theft and vandalism protection, and careless plot owners who leave their plots in shambles during the winter months. There was also a concern for monocropping (rotating crops every 2-3 years allowing soil to replenish its nutrients) and the disregard for sustainable farming techniques. In addition, limited horticulture knowledge has kept this garden from thriving.



At the Abel Maldonado Community Center, 12 students participated in a community planning workshop. Overall, the students were supportive of participating in community garden programs. Among the students, 54% wanted to actively participate in a community garden, 31% didn't want to participate, and 15% thought they might participate. The community input received at the grocery stores showed an even stronger support with 93% of voters supporting urban agriculture/community gardens.



*Participants placed stickers on posters representing what improvements they wanted to see in Santa Maria*



## **OBJECTIVES**

The main focus for the 2011 Santa Maria General Plan Update was centered on community health. Through the use of goals, policies and implementing actions, the vision of creating a healthy community through the design of the built environment was consistent throughout the seven elements of the General Plan. The following is a list of objectives from the Community Services and Infrastructure Element selected as the guide for this document.

### **GOAL CS13                      An Active and Healthy Santa Maria**

Community health takes into account many factors such as access to healthy food, recreational opportunities, and mobility options. It is important for the City of Santa Maria to promote healthy lifestyles by providing services that make healthy behavioral patterns easily accessible.

#### ***Policy CS13.2                      Promote access to healthy foods***

The Parks and Recreation Department should work together with local non-profits to utilize public spaces to promote access to healthy foods through neighborhood markets and community gardens. This will improve access to healthy and locally grown food, and strengthen the local community food system.

#### ***Action CS13.E                      Local Food for Local People***

Schools and other government services should purchase local or organic food for local consumption. Developing partnerships between local farmers and local businesses will promote the social benefits associated with consuming local produce.

#### ***Action CS14.B                      Community Garden Program***

The Community Development Department should amend the Zoning Ordinance to permit community gardens in all Residential, Commercial, Open Space and Public Facilities zoning districts. The Recreation and Parks Department would be the responsible party organizing and maintaining the program. Community gardens are also productive options for meeting open space/par acreage requirement.



## **BRIEF HEALTH OVERVIEW**

Community health is a vital aspect of a city's stability and welfare, and the health of residents should be a critical component of policies that guide the future development of a city. Despite an abundance of food in this country, particularly in California, increasing numbers of Americans leave their homes in a prolonged and often futile search for healthy food for their families. Many walk out their front doors



and see nothing but fast-food outlets and convenience stores selling high-fat, high-sugar processed foods; others see no food vendors of any kind. Without affordable fresh food options, especially fruit and vegetables, adults and children face fundamental challenges to making the healthy food choices that are essential for nutritious, balanced diets. Many people who experience poor food security- the access and availability of food- are also caught in the increasing

obesity epidemic because processed and nutrition-less food tends to be cheap and in abundance. The United States Surgeon General identifies more than 60 percent of the U.S. adult population to be obese or overweight. Obesity can lead to high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, high cholesterol, and sleep apnea. In addition to the potential health consequences, obesity creates a substantial economic burden for the U.S. In 2008, the direct and indirect health costs associated with obesity were estimated to be \$148 billion per year, nationwide (Finkelstein, 2009).

The decline in food security is becoming more common, particularly in low income neighborhoods. Households with higher incomes tend to have better access to healthier, more expensive food, while lower income families may be subject to “food deserts” or limited healthy food options. In California alone, there are four times as many “unhealthy” food outlets (fast food restaurants and convenience stores) as healthy” food outlets (supermarkets, produce vendors and farmers’ markets) (Santa Barbara County, 2009). According to the Economic Research Services Summary Report for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) “approximately 5.1 million people across the nation, including over two million children, are food insecure and lack the resources to obtain nutritious food to live an active and healthy life” (Nord, Andrews and Carlson, 2007). In California, 34.8 percent of the adult population suffers from food insecurity; while 39.5 percent of Santa Barbara County’s adult population is food insecure (Santa Barbara County, 2010). Without grocery stores and other viable fruit and vegetable merchants, neighborhoods lack a critical ingredient of vibrant, livable communities: quality food sources that create jobs, stimulate foot traffic, and bolster local commerce.

A community’s access to healthy food directly influences the health of its people. In 2009, Santa Barbara County’s Public Health Department collaborated with the Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention (CX3) program to conduct a community profile examining the three lowest income communities in Santa Barbara County; two of which were from Santa Maria neighborhoods of Northwest Bunny Area and Newlove Area (Figure 1). This profile was aimed at understanding the dynamics shaping health behaviors and the critical importance of access

to healthy foods and physical activity. Based on survey input and data analysis, these neighborhoods were characterized by limited access to affordable, healthy foods, and dominated by an abundance of stores with cheap, packaged, and less healthy foods. Based on profile statistics, more than half of all Santa Barbara County residents are considered to be overweight or obese (approximately 53.3%).

Santa Barbara County Public Health Department Communities of Excellence Neighborhood Analysis	Santa Maria NW	Santa Maria New Love
Total Population	12,445	11,117
Percent of population living in poverty	61%	61%
Number of Schools	4	3
Number of Parks and Playgrounds	3	2
Number of Farmers Markets	0	0
Number of Community Gardens	0	0
Number of Supermarkets or large grocery stores	0	1
Percent of population living within a half mile of a supermarket or a grocery store	0%	50%
Proportion of supermarket is or large grocery stores with convenient public transit	0 of 0	1 of 1
Number of small markets and other food stores	3	2
Number of convenience stores	7	6
Number of fast-food outlets (all types)	9	6
Fast-food chain outlets within a half mile of schools, parks & playgrounds that offer promotional toy giveaways	Yes	Yes
Ratio of fast food outlet to population	1 to 1383	1 to 1853
<b>Fast Food (% meet standard)</b>	<b>0 of 9</b>	<b>0 of 6</b>
<b>Total Neighborhood Food Store Quality; (Number that meets standards)</b>	<b>1 of 10</b>	<b>1 of 9</b>

**Figure 1:** Santa Barbara County Public Health Department Communities of Excellence Neighborhood Analysis.  
 Source: Santa Barbara County

Local governments have the ability to change this path and create policies that increase food security for everyone, not just the wealthy. Many cities have already begun to incorporate health into their decision making process through goals and policies in the General Plan, changes to zoning, strategic plans, bylaws and program management. A technique that cities are using today to increase food access is through the permitting of urban agriculture and community gardens. According to the USDA, around 15 percent of the world's food is now grown in urban areas (Nord, Andrews and Carlson, 2007). City and suburban agriculture takes the form of backyard, roof-top and balcony gardening, community gardening in vacant lots and parks, roadside urban fringe agriculture and livestock grazing in open space. Barriers, such as liability expenses, code restrictions and a lack of resources often make it difficult for communities to establish or maintain gardens their neighborhoods, but with local government engagement, these obstacles can be overcome.

## **COMMUNITY GARDEN BENEFITS**

Community gardens strengthen an urban community's food security, allowing citizens to grow their own food or for others to donate what they have grown. A community garden is a space where neighbors come together to grow community and steward a piece of open space. Community gardens are gathering spaces that provide fresh produce and plants as well as satisfying labor, neighborhood improvement, sense of community and connection to the environment. A city's community gardens can be as diverse as its gardeners. They can be urban, suburban, or rural; and can grow flowers, vegetables or community. Traditionally, they involve individual gardening plots which community members pay an annual fee for while all shared spaces throughout the garden are cared for together. They function publicly in terms of ownership, access, and management, but can also be owned by local governments or non-profit associations.

Increased density and population growth within cities has led residents to seek safe spaces where they can enjoy the outdoors through gardening. According to the American Community Gardening Association (ACGA), the benefits of community gardening are not just limited to growing and eating your own produce. Many other factors come into play, such as enhanced social interaction, improved quality of life, neighborhood beautification, lower family food budgets, conservation, better eating habits, even crime reduction. The following list details some of the benefits:

### ***Improves the quality of life for people in the garden***

Community gardens provide a place for people to retreat from the noise and commotion of urban environments. Exposure to green space reduces stress and increases a sense of well being and belonging. There are also many practical skills to learn when gardening including how to grow plants, and increased leadership opportunities to maintain the productiveness of a garden.

### ***Beautifies neighborhoods***



Community gardens can revitalize a downtrodden section of a neighborhood; take over vacant lots, rooftops, school yards and even street medians to provide visual interest and natural beauty. Gardening is a great way to explore creativity with color, texture and style giving each garden a unique quality. Development and maintenance of garden space is less expensive than that of parkland, and gardens have actually been shown to increase property values in the immediate vicinity where they are located (ACGA, 2011).

### ***Provides a catalyst for neighborhood and community development***

Community gardens foster the development of community identity and spirit, as well as community ownership and stewardship. They spur friendships, partnerships and support among diverse people, shape the life of the neighborhoods and provide needed community services.

### ***Produces nutritious food***

Growing your own fruits and vegetables provides individuals and families with nutritious and affordable fresh food. Studies have shown that community gardeners and their children tend to eat healthier, more



nutrient rich diets compared to non gardeners (ACGA, 2011). Locally grown food also contains less chemicals, pesticides and pollutants compared to food produced in large factories that have to be packaged, shipped and shelved for long periods of time. Produce purchased at a community garden or local farmer's market has often been picked within 24 hours of the purchase; this freshness not only affects the taste of food, but the nutritional value as well which declines with time.

### ***Reduces family food budgets***

Many community gardeners, especially those from immigrant communities, have taken advantage of food production in community gardens to provide a significant source of food and/or income. These gardens provide opportunities to grow fresh, healthy food that may otherwise not be available to lower income neighborhoods and families. According to the American Community Garden Association, community gardens donate thousands of pounds of fresh produce to food pantries and involve people in processes that provide food security and alleviate hunger (ACGA, 2011).

### ***Conserves resources***

Eating locally grown food even helps in the fight against global warming. Rich Pirog from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture reports that the average fresh food item on the dinner table travels 1,500 miles to get there (Pirog, 2003). Buying locally-produced food eliminates the need for all the fuel-guzzling transportation. In addition, gardening provides an opportunity to connect with nature and learn the value of plants, recycling, water and soil conservation, composting, and the destructiveness of fossil-fuel dependent industrial agriculture.

### ***Creates opportunity for recreation, exercise, therapy, and education***

Gardens can be areas for recreation, exercise, therapy and education. According to the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, “the creation of or enhanced access to places for physical activity combined with informational outreach produced a 48.4 percent increase in frequency of physical activity in addition to a 5.1 percent median increase in aerobic capacity, reduced body fat, weight loss, improved flexibility and an increase in perceived energy” (Sherer, 2006). Gardening also provides the opportunity to get fresh air and enjoy nature. Community gardens provide unique opportunities to teach youth where food comes from, how it’s grown, practical math skills, basic business principles, the importance of community and stewardship, and environmental sustainability. Gardening is also a healthy and inexpensive activity for youth that can bring them close to nature, and allow them to interact with each other in a socially meaningful and physically productive way.



### ***Reduces crime***

Community gardens provide opportunities to meet and engage in social interaction with neighbors. These neighbors can then build small associations to protect the gardens and surrounding areas. Interaction and use at a garden increases “eyes on the street” which deters criminal activity because more people are aware of negative behavior. Scientific studies show that crime decreases in neighborhoods as the amount of green space increases and that vegetation has been seen to alleviate mental fatigue, one of the precursors to violent behavior (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001).

### ***Preserves green space***

Gardening can also have ecological benefits in cities by creating a green oasis in areas where you can usually just find asphalt and concrete. Green spaces provide habitat for birds, animals, and insects, reduce runoff, absorb smog and other pollutants, and help create life-supporting oxygen. Additionally, eating locally encourages the use of local farmland for farming, thus keeping development in check while preserving open space. Community gardens also provide much needed green space in lower-income neighborhoods which typically have access to less green space than do other parts of a community.

***Creates income opportunities and economic development***



Eating locally also helps the local economy because community gardens participate in direct marketing and sell their produce to restaurants, farmers markets and even grocery stores, receiving full retail value for each food dollar spent. Many community garden programs have also created job-training programs that focus on market gardening (gardening to sell produce). Because market gardening requires so many diverse skills, these types of programs are a great way to get experience in the fields of marketing, business management, organizational development, agriculture, horticulture, and education.



***Provides opportunities for intergenerational and cross-cultural connections***

Gardening can be a great connector for different cultures, enabling people to exchange ideas about diverse horticultural traditions and techniques as well as work cooperatively and make decisions through negotiation. Community gardens also provide unique opportunities for new immigrants to produce traditional crops otherwise unavailable locally, provide intergenerational exposure to culture traditions, offer a cultural exchange with other gardeners, and learn about neighborhood groups and other community information. These gardens offer neighborhoods an access point to non-English speaking communities and allow people from diverse backgrounds to work side by side on common goals.

## TYPES OF COMMUNITY GARDENS

There are many kinds of community gardens: large or small, urban or rural. A community garden can be a shared common space, a piece of vacant land, a courtyard in an apartment building or even on rooftops or indoors. Below is a list of various types of community gardens:

**Parks Department Community Gardens** divert city parks and recreations monies to the building and maintaining of community gardens. Community gardens are funded through the Parks Department, while department staff and volunteers care for the gardens.

**Rental plot gardens** are typically organized by local governments or nonprofits. In exchange for a small rental fee, community members or groups have a space to garden and other services, such as water and tools to get them on their way to growing their own fruits, vegetables and flowers.

**Youth/school gardens** allow young people to learn about gardening while exposing them to a variety of other subject areas such as mathematics, botany, ecology, nutrition, and sustainability. School gardens provide an excellent hands-on learning environment. In addition, children learn valuable lessons in working as a team, decision making, life skills and compassion.



**Communal gardens** are put together by a group of people who share the work, and therefore the rewards of gardening. These gardens are not divided into plots, but instead worked cooperatively, dividing produce among gardeners.

**Food pantry gardens** are established at a local food pantry or food bank or other location to provide locally produced, nutritious food to those in need. These coincide with donations gardens, which are established at other locations in the community to grow food that will be donated to a local food pantry.

**Entrepreneurial/job training gardens** teach business, marketing and gardening skills to a specific group, such as youth or refugees. The produce grown is sold at a local farmers' to pay participants for their work. Community gardens can provide a source of income for low-income residents as well as entrepreneurs. Local growers sell produce to individuals, restaurants and in farmers' markets.



**Therapy gardens encourage** mental health and therapy for hospital patients or other groups of people. Therapy gardens provide an opportunity for physical, emotional and spiritual health and healing, as well as an inexpensive source of nutrition. Gardens at elder care centers inspire residents to get exercise and fresh air while working with their neighbors in a community setting.



**Demonstration gardens** allow the public to see different plant varieties, gardening methods, composting techniques. They provide information, classes and places to gather to share knowledge.

**Elder gardens** provide a venue for cultural and historical sharing of knowledge. Knowledge can be passed from generation to generation about native plants and their uses, gardening techniques and plant varieties.

**Neighborhood Gardens** can be located in neighborhood parks or vacant lots and can consist of individual family plots or a group gardening effort. The land may be borrowed, rented or owned by the gardeners. The gardeners generally prepare plant, maintain and harvest from their own plots. Gardeners and their family, friends and neighbors usually consume produce from the gardens rather than selling it. These gardens provide an opportunity for neighbors to come together and grow nutritious food while creating a beautiful green space for community members to spend time in.



*Aerial view of a government housing project community garden in Singapore*

## **CHALLENGES OF COMMUNITY GARDENS**

A discussion of starting and managing a community garden would be incomplete without a discussion of the challenges encountered by gardeners and garden organizers. Common challenges faced by most community garden groups include:

**Management Intensive:** Gardens demand patience, time and the capacity to work with and organize people and projects. They also typically require systems to enforce rules and resolve conflicts.

**Maintenance Intensive:** Grass will need to be mowed, equipment will need to be repaired, and plant debris will need to be composted, among other things.

**Angry neighbors and bad gardeners:** These complaints can pose problems for a community garden. Neighbors tend to complain to municipal governments about messy, unkempt gardens or rowdy behavior; most gardens can ill afford poor relations with neighbors, local politicians or potential sponsors.

**Limited Participation:** From year to year, gardeners and garden leaders come and go from community gardens for a variety of reasons. Because of this, it can be challenging to maintain a sense of community and consistency at gardens.

**Theft and vandalism:** Is commonplace at many community gardens. As a general rule, theft is the result of adult activity and vandalism is carried out by children.

**Limited Gardening skills:** Many new and some returning gardeners don't know a lot about gardening. Gardeners who lack gardening skills and have poor gardening experiences may be more likely to give up.

**Limited Leadership skills:** Many gardeners may not have the skills to take a leadership role at their respective garden.

**Limited Services and supplies:** Plowing, tilling and the delivery of compost and mulch can be challenging services for gardeners to arrange for themselves.



**Limited Water:** Most gardens need some way to irrigate fruits and vegetables during the summer. Finding a source of water can be challenging. Also, because most community gardens are located on borrowed land, installing a water hydrant may not be feasible or cost effective.

**Site permanency:** Most community gardens are located on borrowed land. This limits the amount of infrastructure that can be added to a particular site. It may also create an atmosphere of instability among gardeners since the garden could be taken away.



## **STEPS TO CREATE A COMMUNITY GARDEN**

Before starting a community garden, there are a few steps that need to be followed. All community gardens will experience problems somewhere along the way; however, successful and strategic planning before and during implementation will help foster a flourishing and productive community garden.

**Gather potential gardeners and neighborhood support:** Neighborhood groups, schools, clubs and partner agencies wishing to start a community garden should hold informational meetings to gauge demand and support from potential gardeners and neighborhoods. Determining leadership roles is also important in this part of the planning stage to make sure communication and progress runs smoothly. The group should also decide what type of garden they want: a communal space to benefit a certain groups, individual plots for family use, educational gardens, or market gardens, etc.

**Create rules of operation:** Establishing a set of rules based on the type of garden created, is crucial to a gardens success. Rules will determine how plots are laid out, how they are assigned, the size of each plot, the tools needed to garden, minimum maintenance requirements for both inside plots and in common areas and whether the garden will conduct on-site or off-site produce sales. It will also need to be determined how these rules will be enforced and by whom.

**Identify Funding/ Sponsors:** Determining a source of funding, grants or sponsorship is important for a garden's development and preservation. In addition, political support will be important to ensure that local policies regarding the use of community gardens will remain intact.

**Choose a site with resources available to support the garden:** Choosing a proper site will be one of the most difficult decisions because not only does the land need to be vacant and available for purchase or rent, but it also must be serviced by infrastructure such as water and electricity, and receive adequate sun exposure. Encouraging cities to keep a potential garden land inventory will make it easier for choosing garden locations. Once the owner of the land is identified, it is important to know what the previous land uses on the site were to determine if there may be any soil contamination, and existing nutrients or heavy metals. Liability insurance coverage is another important thing to consider during this stage of acquiring land.

**Submit a complete community garden application to city (if applies):** If the city in question requires a community garden application, the form should be filled out completely. Many times an application is required if the garden is located in a zoning district that allows community gardens as a conditionally permitted use. The proposed garden application would then be reviewed by city staff, the planning commission or city council. The applicants will also need to prepare a design plan that complies with city development standards.

**Develop and prepare the site:** Once the land is acquired and the permit approved by the city, developing the garden can begin. Gathering resources including materials, tools and labor, as well as deciding how the plots will be laid out and where the communal spaces will be, will help organize the community garden development.

**Hold gardening workshops to improve gardener's skills:** Educational gardening workshops should be held often to teach community members new gardening techniques and information. Building strong gardens will help preserve their existence in the long run.

## CASE STUDIES

### Seattle, WA P-Patch Community Gardening Program

Seattle's P-Patch Program began in 1971 when a University of Washington student started a pilot project to teach young people to grow vegetables. Human Services took over the program in 1974, and the program was once again moved in 1997 to the Department of Neighborhoods Community Building Division. A unique partnership between the Friends of P-Patch, the City, and volunteers now maintain 75 community gardens located throughout Seattle. These P-Patches equal approximately 23 acres, serving 4,400 gardeners. Gardeners throughout the city contributed 17,000 hours maintaining the common areas of the garden in 2010. All P-Patch Community Gardens are open to the public to enjoy and are used as restorative spaces, learning/idea incubators, and places to gather and visit. The gardens also provide a way to give back to the community and show their concern for the value of organic vegetables and community by supplying fresh produce to Seattle food banks and feeding programs.

According to the Department of Neighborhood's website, in 2010 alone, P-Patch gardeners donated 20,889 pounds=41,778 servings of fresh produce. In recent years the department saw an increased demand for space in P-Patch community gardens and the need to shrink the waitlists. In 2010, all gardens were assigned a maximum square foot limit as a tool to open up more gardening space. In 2008, citizens passed the Parks and Green Space Levy of which \$2 million has been dedicated to the development of new P-Patch community gardens. Also, to address the broadening interest in urban agriculture (of which community gardening is a part); the P-Patch program increased the palette of choice by experimenting with different community garden models. These included large tracts for food growth, collective gardens that do not have individual garden plots, and giving gardens.

The City of Seattle recognizes the economic, environmental and social values of community gardens and therefore has constructed policies to protect their preservation. Resolution 28610 supports the long-term expansion and maintenance of the P-Patch Program. Seattle identifies the P-Patch Program as an integral part of the City's Comprehensive Plan through the Seattle Urban Village Open Space and Recreation Facility Goals (City of Seattle). Thus, appropriate ordinances must be strengthened to encourage, preserve and protect community gardens, particularly in the medium and high density residential areas. The City of Seattle also promotes inter-agency and inter-governmental cooperation to expand garden opportunities through outreach, budgetary support, and surplus of city property.



*Hillman City P Patch in Seattle, WA*



## Berkeley, CA Comprehensive Plan

According to the City of Berkeley Department of Planning and Development, there are 17 gardens throughout the city, which provide residents with 1.65 gardens per ten thousand. The 2001 General Plan for the City of Berkeley includes policies and actions in both the Open Space Element and the Environmental Management Element to encourage, protect and support community gardens as open space and as a source of local food. These policies recognize community gardens as a desirable land use and propose ways to encourage and support community gardening activities (City of Berkeley, 2001). However, community gardens are not defined or specified as an allowed use within the zoning ordinance. The following text is from the 2001 General Plan:

### ***Policy OS-8 Community Gardens***

Encourage and support community gardens as important open space resources that build communities and provide a local food source.

- A. Encourage neighborhood groups to organize, design, and manage community gardens particularly where space is available that is not suitable for housing, parks, pathways, or recreation facilities. Ensure that garden plots are allocated according to a fair and equitable formula.
- B. Require all publicly subsidized community gardens to maintain regular "open to the public" hours.
- C. Include community gardens in the planning for the Santa Fe Right-of-Way.
- D. Pursue community gardens in high-density areas with little private open space suitable for gardening.
- E. Increase support for community gardens through partnerships with other government agencies, particularly the Berkeley Unified School District, neighborhood groups, businesses, and civic and gardening organizations.
- F. Support school-based gardens and the involvement of youth in growing and preparing their own food.

The Berkeley Community Garden Collective (BCGC) brings together diverse members of the community around a common commitment to urban agriculture and access to healthy food for all residents of Berkeley. BCGC is presently engaged in two areas of work: the creation and maintenance of organic gardens for community use and the development of an emerging local food system. BCGC partners with other organizations to assist and protect community gardens, facilitate the formation of new gardens,



and advocate food security initiatives in local schools and throughout the city. In 1999, the City of Berkeley passed the Berkeley Food and Nutrition Policy, which aims to build a strong local food system through the support of small-scale sustainable agriculture (e.g., community gardens, local farms). The Policy Council serves as an advisory capacity to the Department of Health and Human Services and City Council on food issues, and provides a forum to discuss food related topics of concern to the community.

*Berkeley California Northbrae Westbrae Neighborhood Community Garden*

## Boston, MA Zoning Code

The City of Boston has had organized support for community gardens since at least 1977. Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN) is an organization that seeks to expand and better urban open space through ownership, acquisition, programs, and technical assistance. It owns a quarter of the 250 community gardens in Boston (Boston Areas Natural Network, 2002). This provides Boston residents with 4.24 gardens per ten-thousand people.

In 1988, the Boston Redevelopment Authority updated the Boston Zoning Code to include a special zoning sub-district in the Open Space Zone for community gardens to ensure their long term protection. The Open Space Subdistrict has some flexibility whereby the district may be used as an “overlay,” meaning that the land contained within the OS Subdistrict is not permanently designated. This allows the City of Boston some flexibility in rezoning the land without costly and timely changes to the zoning map, which must go through Plan Commission and the Common Council (Boston Redevelopment Authority). The following text is from Article 33:

**Section 33-8- Community Garden Open Space Subdistricts.** Community garden open space (OS-G) subdistricts shall consist of land appropriate for and limited to the cultivation of herbs, fruits, flowers, or vegetables, including the cultivation and tillage of soil and the production, cultivation, growing, and harvesting of any agricultural, floricultural, or horticultural commodity; such land may include Vacant Public Land.



*Berkeley Street Community Garden in Boston Massachusetts*

## Portland, OR Urban Food Zoning Code

Currently, the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) is working collaboratively with the Portland-Multnomah County Food Policy Council on a new zoning code. The Urban Food Zoning Code Update will be the City of Portland's first comprehensive look at how zoning code regulations affect traditional and emerging ways of producing and distributing food. Through a dynamic community discussion, this project will establish zoning code regulations that support Portlanders' access to healthy food at farmers markets and community gardens, while ensuring that surrounding neighborhoods are protected from impacts such as noise, traffic and pollutants (City of Portland Oregon Bureau of Planning, 2011).

The existing Zoning Code recognizes community gardens as conditional and permitted uses within the Open Space Category. Community gardens are conditionally permitted in Retail Sales and Service, Commercial Outdoor Recreation, Basic Utilities, Community Service, Parks and Open Areas, Schools, Daycares, Mining, Radio Tower Transmission Facilities, and Rail Line and Utility Corridors. As permitted uses they are permitted in the Agriculture district (City of Portland Oregon Bureau of Planning, 2011). This limited use of community gardens creates a barrier because proposed gardens must be brought before the Planning Commission and City Council for approval. The current distribution of community gardens is unequal throughout the city because their location has been based on expressed demand and development opportunities.

The city is also undergoing a Comprehensive Plan Update which will incorporate goals that protect and preserve the use of community gardens. The previous comprehensive plan did not reference community gardens (City of Portland, 2010). In the Draft Portland Plan, the Strategy Plan for Healthy Connected Neighborhoods contains a policy dedicated to Healthy and Affordable Food. Action 8 proposes to "amend the zoning code to support urban food production and distribution" and Action 9 "proposes to create 1,000 more community gardens" (City of Portland, 2010). The Portland Parks and Recreation Department Community Gardens Program has been in charge of maintaining all community gardens in the city. The program has grown from three garden sites in 1974 to 35 sites in 2010 with about 1000 plots throughout the city for approximately 3,000 gardeners (City of Portland, 2010). The overall goal for



*Fulton Community Garden in Portland Oregon*

community gardens is to provide a network of community gardens that are distributed equitably throughout the city. Locations should be chosen based on demand, appropriate land, and where adverse impacts are minimal. While community gardens should be located on publicly owned properties whenever possible, they should be sited carefully taking into account other desirable uses. Private sites should not be used unless there are no other options and there is a legal agreement so that the garden can remain on the site for at least 15 to 20 years (City of Portland, 2010)

## **IMPLEMENTING THE COMMUNITY GARDENS IN SANTA MARIA**

To implement the goals of the 2011 General Plan Update concept, staff recommends that the Santa Maria Zoning Code be amended to change current zoning language to include “community gardens” as a permitted use in areas zoned Open Space, Residential and Public Facilities; and as a conditional use in the Central Business and General Commercial zoning districts. Including community gardens in the zoning code would in effect protect and promote the long term use of them.

According to California State law, any discrepancies between the general plan and the zoning code may cause legal challenges and if ‘community gardens’ are specifically permitted in the zoning code in Santa Maria, but not mentioned in the comprehensive plan, this valuable legal foothold could be lost. As mentioned in the Objectives section, the following goal, policy and actions of the Community Services and Infrastructure Element provide the basis for this recommended change to the Zoning Code.

<b>GOAL CS13</b>	<b>An Active and Healthy Santa Maria</b>
<b>Policy CS13.2</b>	<b>Promote access to healthy foods</b>
<b>Action CS13.E</b>	<b>Local Food for Local People</b>
<b>Action CS14.B</b>	<b>Community Garden Program</b>

Legally and politically, modifications to the zoning code provide the strongest position for community garden preservation because changes to the zoning code require a public hearing. As a “permitted use,” a community garden would be allowed to operate within particular zones in accordance with the zoning code. As a “conditional use,” the Planning Commission would have the authority to review the proposed gardens to ensure their compatibility and consistency with adjacent uses. These parcels could be privately or publicly held; if privately held, a minimum term of use should be required. Zoning requirements for site maintenance would provide the City enforcement powers over the gardens. Santa Maria’s Department of Recreation and Parks would be the responsible agency for community gardens and would also oversee the Advisory Committee. Further detail is provided in the Staff Report.

### **The amendment would:**

(1) Add the definition of community gardens in Chapter 12-2, so the diverse use of community gardens are legally recognized.

#### **Section 12-2.39 C Community Garden**

*“One or more lots or parcels of land used to produce vegetables, fruits, flowers, or other plant material for personal use by the property owner or individuals authorized by the property owner.”*

(2) Amend the permitted uses in the following zoning districts to include community gardens: Open Space, Residential Agriculture, Single Family Residential, Single Family Small Lot Residential, Medium Density Residential, High Density Residential and Public Facilities and Institutional District

(3) Amend the conditional uses in the Central Business District (C-1) and General Commercial District (C-2) to include community gardens. As a conditional use, the Planning Commission will have the authority to review potential gardens for compatibility and compliance with other uses in these districts.

(4) Establish a Community Garden Program/ Community Garden Advisory Committee

(5) Add Chapter 12-24 Community Garden Development Standards. This chapter will include development standards, rules of operation, garden fees and conditional use permit procedures.



## CONCLUSION

The City of Santa Maria has an opportunity to become a healthy community by increasing its food security. Community gardens will provide numerous health and economic benefits to residents and community input has demonstrated residents support for them. Incorporating the use of community gardens into the City of Santa Maria's Zoning Code and General Plan will provide legal support for their long term preservation. The proposed ordinance would have the overall effect of providing residents with an opportunity to grow and sell their own food, in any permitted zoning district or upon issuance of a Conditional Use Permit by the Zoning Administrator or the Planning Commission. By establishing a Community Garden Program and an Advisory Committee under the Recreation and Parks Department, community gardens and their gardeners will be able to thrive in a supportive community.



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