



Pentridge Community Garden

Amenity Plan

September 2020



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Background and purpose

Pentridge Community Garden (PCG) is a membership-based space for people to garden, compost, and spend time with others in the community. It contains a mixture of communal and personal plots, as well as fruit trees, bee hives, and a hydroponic system. The space is owned by Shayher Group, the developer of the Pentridge site, and leased to Moreland Community Gardening (MCG) on a temporary basis until the area is developed. The garden operates successfully under the leadership of its volunteer-run Organising Committee (OC), which is supported by the MCG Board.

The value in creating an Amenity Plan was identified by the MCG Board and compiled by the Community Gardening Coordinator (funded through a grant from Moreland City Council), with input from the OC, Board, and garden members. The plan identifies key areas in which the garden's value to its members and the community can be further enhanced, with actions to be undertaken and indicators with which to measure the impact of those actions.

To inform the plan, consultation was undertaken with the OC during meetings, through informal discussions at the garden with members, and via an online survey. During this consultation the purpose of the plan was left broad, identified simply as a plan to enhance the enjoyment and value of the garden.

Feedback indicates that members are extremely happy with the garden's facilities and management. The word cloud below gives an indication of members' favourite things about the garden, with an emphasis on the community around it, being able to grow fresh produce, and the enjoyment of the space itself. You only have to visit the community garden during a Sunday working bee to see that it is a hive of activity, filled with active work, positive conversations, skill building, and produce sharing.

Key focus areas

This plan identifies six key focus areas for enhancement, ordered according to survey results: (1) community engagement and participation, (2) rat control, (3) site access, (4) weed control, (5) toilet provision, and (6) management.

Each focus area includes a number of actions to be undertaken, and measures by which to assess the impact of those actions. The actions are listed in order of priority, informed by discussion with the OC, and feedback from the online survey distributed as part of the consultation process.

1 . Community engagement and participation

Background

The garden is always looking to increase the number of active members, in order to extend the reach of the garden and to increase the funding available for projects and everyday operations.

Actions

The following actions have been identified during consultation with members and the OC, and have been prioritised primarily according to feedback from the online survey.

Priority actions:

1. Install sign next to gate with white board / cork board for communication with garden members and the public (works have already commenced on this project – see photo 1)
2. Purchase pop up A frame sign that can be set up at the front gate when sessions are running, to encourage people to visit
3. Install a second, pedestrian only, gate at the lower end of the garden
4. Run workshops on gardening and related topics, e.g. preserving
5. Investigate methods for re-engaging with members post-COVID
6. Investigate methods for broader community engagement post-COVID



Photo 1: Construction has started on an informative sign next to the front gate

Additional actions for future consideration:

1. Designate one person at each event to wear a high vis vest and take enquiries from visitors
2. Run gardening sessions specifically for children
3. Increase the garden's online presence

Progress measures

1. Number of people attending organised events
2. Presence of members at the garden (anecdotal evidence)

2. Rat control

Background

There have been numerous sightings of rats at the garden, particularly around the compost area, by members and local residents. This is to be expected in a community garden, and may be exacerbated at PCG due to it being a large site with many places for rats to nest and hide. However, unfortunately the presence of rats can impact people's enjoyment of the garden, and also potentially compromise the relationship with adjacent residents.

Currently rats are managed primarily by members of the OC through a combination of deterrence (e.g. turning the compost bins regularly), trapping, and baiting.

Based on survey feedback, members are happy with the current level of management, with only low levels of support for purchasing more effective rat traps (21% supported this action), and fundraising to hire a professional (14% supported this action), the latter of which has been investigated and found to be prohibitively expensive.

However, 57% of those surveyed did want more communication about rat management with members (and 29% also wanted more communication with local residents).

Actions

The following actions were identified during consultation with members and the OC, and have been prioritised primarily according to feedback from the online survey.

1. Continue communicating with members and residents about rat management as required
2. Put email template for responding to concerns about rats in an easily accessible location within the garden's Google Drive folder

Progress measures

1. Complaints received
2. Anecdotal evidence about rat numbers and management

3. Site access

Background

Site access encompasses a person's ability to visit the garden and participate in activities, both in terms of physical ability and other factors including, for example, being able to find the garden, and knowing how to get involved.

The location of the garden is clearly explained on the Moreland Community Gardening website, and is listed on Google Maps. The garden is clearly visible from the street with a large sign displaying its name on the outside of the fence (photo 2). At the time of writing, the OC is in discussions with Shayher about the installation of more permanent signage.



Photo 2: The garden has a large sign on the south eastern corner

The garden is well serviced by public transport, with a bus stop across the street, a tram stop 600m away, and a train station 750m away. For cyclists, it is close to the Merri Creek Trail, with ample space to park a bike on site. There is free car parking in nearby streets.

Most of the garden beds are at ground level (photo 3). There are some raised beds that are more ergonomic, though many of these are for private plots only. There are no steps at the site, however much of the site may be difficult for some to traverse, as it is quite rough and undulating. Unfortunately, the impermanence of the site (as it is slated for development at some stage) means that carrying out sophisticated landscaping works, such as installing concrete paths and many raised beds, are not currently viable.



Photo 3: The majority of garden beds are at ground level (left), while some are raised (right)

In terms of psychological barriers, the garden is surrounded by a high fence with barbed wire across the top. At the time of writing, the OC is in discussions with Shayher about removing the barbed wire as it is arguably unsightly and unnecessary.

The garden's only access point is via a large double gate on its southern side (photo 4), adjacent to Moonering Avenue, which some members have suggested does not look very welcoming. Some members have also expressed concern that because they are such a tight knit and well organised group, they may appear intimidating to others at first glance, which could deter potential new members from getting involved.



Photo 4: Entrance gates



Photo 6: Aerial view of the garden (source: Robyn Sampson)

Actions

The following actions were identified during consultation with members and the OC, and have been prioritised primarily according to feedback from the online survey.

Priority actions:

1. Install second gate at the lower end of the garden, to make the garden more psychologically inviting and provide easier access for prams and wheelchairs
2. Introduce additional open garden sessions run by members

Additional actions for future consideration:

1. Where possible, install paths with hard surfaces that can be used by wheelchair users
2. Investigate running all access gardening sessions
3. Install signs to remind people to leave the garden tidy to reduce trip hazards

Progress measures

1. Installation and use of pedestrian gate
2. Anecdotal evidence
3. Increase in number of open garden sessions run by members other than those in the OC

4. Weed control

Background

Volunteers have highlighted weed removal/suppression as activities that can detract from their enjoyment of the garden. While the presence of weeds does provide a learning opportunity (for identification and removal skills), it is important that they do not get out of control and significantly detract from other garden activities. The main weed species at the garden are Field Bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*) (photo 6) and Couch Grass (*Cynodon dactylon*), both of which are difficult to smother or remove thoroughly through physical methods. They also both seem capable of surviving a cycle through the on-site composting system.

Currently, weed control techniques being used are suppression with weed mat, brush cutting (in the swale area), and removal by hand. When weeds are removed, they are either added straight to the compost, or solarised in black plastic bags before being added to the compost. The large area in the northern section of the site, known as the swale (photo 7), needs frequent brush cutting to keep weeds controlled. As power tools cannot be kept on site and only some members are willing and/or able to carry out brush cutting, management of this area can be an arduous task.

Mulch is useful for the suppression of weeds, and is currently purchased by the garden out of its operational budget (funded through membership payments).



Photo 6: Field Bindweed growing along fence line



Photo 7: Swale area on northern side of site, which requires frequent brush cutting

Actions

The following actions were identified during consultation with members and the OC, and have been prioritised primarily according to feedback from the online survey.

Priority actions:

1. Investigate sourcing free excess mulch from Moreland City Council and/or Shayher
2. Purchase new brush cutter for controlling weeds in swale area
3. Increase frequency of brush cutting in swale area by engaging more people in the task
4. Investigate use of council green bins for weeds that cannot be easily composted

Additional actions for future consideration:

1. Solarise weeds (by putting in plastic bags / covering with plastic) to kill them before adding them to the compost
2. Spray weeds with organic weed killer (e.g. 'Slasher') in areas where they cannot be easily managed through current methods (this would require further consultation with garden members if it were to take place)

3. Spray weeds with glyphosate in areas where they cannot be easily managed through current methods (this would require further consultation with garden members if it were to take place, particularly as the garden policy is to use organic materials only)
4. Purchase mulch in bulk using garden operational funds
5. Investigate use of steam or flame weed removal methods

Progress measures

1. Anecdotal evidence
2. Photographs

5. Toilet provision

Background

There is currently a composting toilet on site (photo 8), rented from Composting Toilet Systems, and paid for by donation from two current garden members. As this current arrangement is not sustainable for individuals or the garden, it is necessary to consider options for providing a toilet on site long term.

Actions

The online survey revealed overwhelming support for fundraising to purchase a composting toilet, with 93% of respondents supporting this action.

Only 20% of respondents supported paying for the toilet hire out of the operational budget.

Further research is required into options for an affordable toilet, possibly through part sponsorship as suggested by a survey respondent.



Photo 8: Composting toilet on site

Progress measures

1. Continue being able to provide toilet without private donation from members

6. Management

Background

Survey respondents gave great feedback about current management by the OC. 83% said that they were happy with the level of guidance currently given for garden activities, 17% indicated that they would like more guidance, and no respondents said that they would like less.

However, everyday operations at the garden are heavily reliant on a small number of people, and this is not necessarily sustainable for those individuals. It is also a risk to the ongoing viability of the garden.

To reduce the pressure on a small number of people, we would like to encourage all garden members to feel confident gardening independently and having input into activities, e.g. deciding which crops are planted where. This is dependent on providing opportunities for, and promoting, effective communication between all members.

Actions

The following actions were identified during consultation with members and the OC, and have been prioritised primarily according to feedback from the online survey.

Priority actions:

1. Install a map of the garden on the sign next to the front gate, and use it to foster greater communication between members about garden activities (work on this has already commenced)
2. Continue listing tasks to be done at the garden on the members Facebook page

Additional actions for future consideration:

1. Have specific volunteer positions, e.g. Compost Coordinator, Seed Saving Coordinator, Social Media Coordinator
2. Have a designated 'Garden Manager' to oversee everyday tasks

Other suggestions from survey:

1. Publish videos on common garden tasks, e.g. planting, turning compost
2. Continue to encourage use of the members FB group

Progress measures

1. Follow up survey
2. Anecdotal evidence, e.g. use of map for communicating about tasks, reduced pressure on core garden members

Summary table

Focus area	Priority actions	Progress measures
Community engagement and participation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Install sign next to gate with white board / cork board for communication with garden members and the public (works have already commenced on this project – see photo 1) 2. Purchase pop up A frame sign that can be set up at the front gate when sessions are running, to encourage people to visit 3. Install a second, pedestrian only, gate at the lower end of the garden 4. Run workshops on gardening and related topics, e.g. preserving 5. Investigate methods for re-engaging with members post-COVID 6. Investigate methods for broader community engagement post-COVID 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of people attending organised events 2. Presence of members at the garden (anecdotal evidence)
Rat control	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue communicating with members and residents about rat management as required 2. Put email template for responding to concerns about rats in an easily accessible location within the garden’s Google Drive folder 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complaints received 2. Anecdotal evidence about rat numbers and management
Site access	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Install second gate at the lower end of the garden, to make the garden more psychologically inviting and provide easier access for prams and wheelchairs 2. Introduce additional open garden sessions run by members 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Installation and use of pedestrian gate 2. Anecdotal evidence 3. Increase in number of open garden sessions run by members other than those in the OC

Weed control	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigate sourcing free excess mulch from Moreland City Council and/or Shayher 2. Purchase new brush cutter for controlling weeds in swale area 3. Increase frequency of brush cutting in swale area by engaging more people in the task 4. Investigate use of council green bins for weeds that cannot be easily composted 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anecdotal evidence 2. Photographs
Toilet provision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigate options for purchase of toilet 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue being able to provide toilet without private donation from members
Management	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Install a map of the garden on the sign next to the front gate, and use it to foster greater communication between members about garden activities (work on this has already commenced) 2. Continue listing tasks to be done at the garden on the members Facebook page 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Follow up survey 2. Anecdotal evidence, e.g. use of map for communicating about tasks, reduced pressure on core garden members

Implementation

Implementation of the actions will be coordinated by the OC members and MCG Community Gardening Coordinator, with assistance from general garden members, and guidance from the MCG Board where required.

Progress will be discussed at monthly OC meetings, and tracked via this spreadsheet:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1z2eCk0QFt1Guk5zFH1FYCCb25jfUzlb39aBmxJJMY9U/edit#gid=0>

A follow up report detailing progress and any adjustments to the actions or focus areas will be published by the Community Gardening Coordinator in late 2020 or early 2021.

Stay in touch

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