

## **VBE School Food Garden Policy Statement – June 2010**

The Vancouver Board of Education recognizes the important role school food gardens can play in students' learning. Garden-based learning can enhance academic achievement through integration of hands-on experiences into diverse subjects such as math, science, nutrition and environmental education. Garden-based learning also allows students to discover and experience fresh, healthy food and to make healthy food choices.

The use of school food gardens is consistent with the Board's commitment to sustainability and healthy food environments. School food gardens allow for the incorporation of fresh, local fruit and vegetables into the cafeteria and school meal program. A school food garden can also play a role in increasing the food security of the students, families and the community by providing space for the production of food through collaborative community and school gardens.

The Vancouver Board of Education therefore encourages and supports the development of school food gardens, recognizing the many benefits to developing and maintaining school food gardens including opportunities for learning, for increasing access to healthy food, for promoting enhanced social and emotional development and for contributing to the greening of school grounds and the building of green spaces for neighbourhoods in Vancouver.

District goals, relative to garden projects, are to help the school community carry out a successful and sustainable project that meets the above stated outcomes while adhering to district codes and standards. The VBE Food Gardens Process document outlines the process of planning, designing, implementing, maintaining and sustaining school and daycare food gardens (located on VBE property) to ensure their success over the long term.

## **VBE Food Gardens Process**

### **Welcome to the VBE Food Gardens Process**

The Vancouver Board of Education (VBE) encourages and supports the development of school food gardens for learning, for increasing access to healthy food, for community and social development as well as beautification and greening of the schoolyard. Refer to the VBE School Garden policy statement for background on defining school gardens, benefits to school gardens and VBE support for school gardens.

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## Guiding Principles for the VBE School Garden Policy

The following guidelines are to help the school community plan and implement a successful, sustainable project, which meets codes and district standards.

- To embrace the spirit of caring, social responsibility, inclusiveness, co-operation, team-work, consensus and collaborative processes in the development of the garden space.
- To ensure the involvement of children (daycare) and students (schools) throughout the planning, design, construction and maintenance of the garden.
- To give students the opportunity to plant, harvest, prepare, and eat food they have grown.
- To integrate eating experiences, food gardens, food preparation and nutritional education into the school curriculum for all grades. To ensure that the garden space is used to deliver and is connected to curriculum studies.
- To encourage the use of environmental 'best practices' for organic gardening (pesticide and herbicide free, no treated lumber), water use, soil building, harvesting and seed saving.
- To support students in the growing of culturally appropriate foods at their schools as well as to explore the cultural food and agriculture traditions represented by the diverse populations of Vancouver.
- To promote environmental stewardship by involving students and local community in the ongoing maintenance of the garden space, weeding, watering, and garbage removal and compost care.
- To respect the rights and responsibilities of the VBE Grounds crews as laid out by their collective bargaining agreements.
- To ensure approvals and implementation take place within a reasonable timeframe.
- To ensure that no poisonous plants shall be used in the school garden, and to encourage the use of heirloom fruit and vegetable varieties where possible.
- To ensure that the garden project is sustainable through ongoing maintenance throughout the school year and is continued through subsequent years.

## Process steps

There are six steps in the project process as laid out in the diagram below.

1. Project Idea
2. Initial approval from VBE Grounds Department
3. Complete Application Process
4. Final approval for development
5. Garden Installation
6. Completed Project



### Step 1. Project Idea

A school food garden that engages the broad school and neighborhood community, is more likely to be successful. School food gardens can be wonderful places with vast potential for engagement. During the project idea step, begin to discuss the garden idea with parents, school administration, teachers, students and external partners or groups.

Creating a successful garden project will take some work, but the result will be worth it. For the garden to be viable in the long-term, it will need involvement from more than one or two people. The first step in the process is to form a school garden committee to ensure a minimum of support for the project. For example, we suggest a minimum 2 staff, 2 parents, 2 students and an administrator but the people and numbers will vary

depending on the school. This committee could be a sub-committee, a stand alone committee, or a sub-group of the PAC, environmental or green club. The school custodian should also be consulted and invited to participate in the garden committee.

### **Things to discuss at this step;**

- Your vision and goal for the project
  - The location, size and type of garden. (e.g. do you want pots with herbs, raised garden beds, fruit trees, etc.)
  - Who the contact person for the project will be
  - Where you will seek funding
  - Ideas for summer maintenance
  - Possible partners
  - Review the Food Garden Application (Step 3) to become aware of what will be expected for the application –you don't have to address all of the items in Step 3 at this stage.
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## **Step 2. Initial approval from VBE Grounds**

Once you've talked about the idea and concept within the school community and have some initial ideas about the garden, you're ready to meet with the VBE Grounds Supervisor.

The grounds supervisor will meet with your group, learn about your vision, talk through your ideas for the garden, answer questions and make suggestions. Out of this meeting the grounds supervisor will either give initial approval to go to the next step of the process, or not. If initial approval is not given, the grounds supervisor will give you the items that need to be worked on. After the items of concern have been addressed, you will need to arrange another meeting with the grounds supervisor to receive initial approval.

Once you have initial approval, you are ready to move to Step 3.

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## **Step 3. Complete the Application Process**

The following stages are included in the Application Process and submitting to Grounds Supervisor:

- A. Develop your garden scope
- B. Develop your project timeline
- C. Identify your possible funding source(s)
- D. Develop your garden design

- E. Create your maintenance plan
- F. Succession plan

### **A. Develop your garden scope**

The first step to a successful project is to define the project scope. This is different from the more conceptual idea discussed in Step 2. The scope should include all of the details of the project. Grounds staff cannot design the project for you, but can help you define the scope and suggest resources to help you. Ultimately, a successful project will promote broad-based ownership of the project design, implementation and maintenance.

These questions may help you outline the project scope:

- What are the goals for this garden? Education? Community building? Food Security? Food production?
- Who will be using this garden? Is it a learning garden for students and parents during the school year only? Is it a community garden intended for year-round use? Will another organization be sharing use of the garden?
- What is the location and size of the garden?
- Who will be participating in the design of the project? Is one of your volunteers a landscape designer already or will you be looking for someone to assist you with the design?
- How will you get community input into the design of the project? How often will you schedule meetings to get that input?
- Who will be installing the garden? Make sure it follows VBE union codes and standards - the VBE grounds supervisor will help with this.
- How will the garden be watered? VBE does not provide irrigation to garden projects. Without an irrigation system, what is the water source and how will water be transported to the garden? Can plants be used to minimize the need for watering? Will you be raising funds for an irrigation system?
- And most importantly, how will the garden be maintained long-term? How will it be maintained over the summer? The VBE requires a long-term maintenance agreement with the school garden committee and administrator.

### **B. Develop your project timeline**

The timeline should include:

- Time to design the garden and complete the garden drawings
- Time to review the design with members of the community, students and the school staff. This will require setting up meetings and giving attendees sufficient notice before meetings.
- Time for VBE grounds and maintenance staff to review the garden design to ensure that standards and codes are met and availability of grounds staff.
- Time for construction, including ordering supplies, soil, etc

- Time for planting, including determining what to plant and when it could be ready.

It is helpful to think about when you hope to have the garden \*finished\* and then work backwards. A landscape designer can assist you in planning your schedule if needed.

**Completion of the application does not guarantee approval of the project as there are other factors such as availability of grounds staff.**

### **C. Identify your possible funding source(s)**

You need to identify current or potential funding sources for the garden. The VBE does not have the resources to fund garden projects, therefore the garden committee needs to fully fund the project. While funding may not already be identified at this stage, a plan to secure funding is essential. VBE cannot give final approval for the project to go forward without a plan for funding.

Ideas for fundraising:

- Apply for grants
- Partner with non-profits
- Seek community involvement, pro bono and other donations in design, materials, and implementation
- Fundraising initiatives

Costs to consider:

- water hook up
- fencing
- soil and amendments
- wood (if raised beds are to be built)
- garden tools
- seeds
- shed / tool area
- plants

### **D. Develop your garden design**

By this point you have already determined the location of the garden and discussed it with the Grounds Supervisor. For the Project Design phase, you will need to identify where specific elements of the garden will be located and what materials will be used for plants, walkways, edges, fencing, etc.

Remember to start small. A larger garden project can be developed in phases over a few years. Phasing also allows the committee to evaluate how the garden is working and make corrections in future phases and assists in the ability of the volunteer group to establish long-term maintenance. Also, this gives future volunteers the chance to become engaged and give input in later phases, which may help to keep enthusiasm high.

Consider partnering with an external organization that has expertise in this process. Potential partner groups include:

- a. Evergreen
- b. Environmental Youth Alliance (EYA)
- c. Society Promoting Environmental Conservation (SPEC)
- d. Master Gardeners
- e. UBC students (Land and Food Systems, landscape architecture)
- f. Neighbouring School
- g. Local church or community centre

## Design and Draw

The project design is critical to the success of the project. A successful project will use materials that are safe for the school, rugged, drought- and rain-tolerant, and low maintenance.

Consider these important design issues:

Location and physical layout

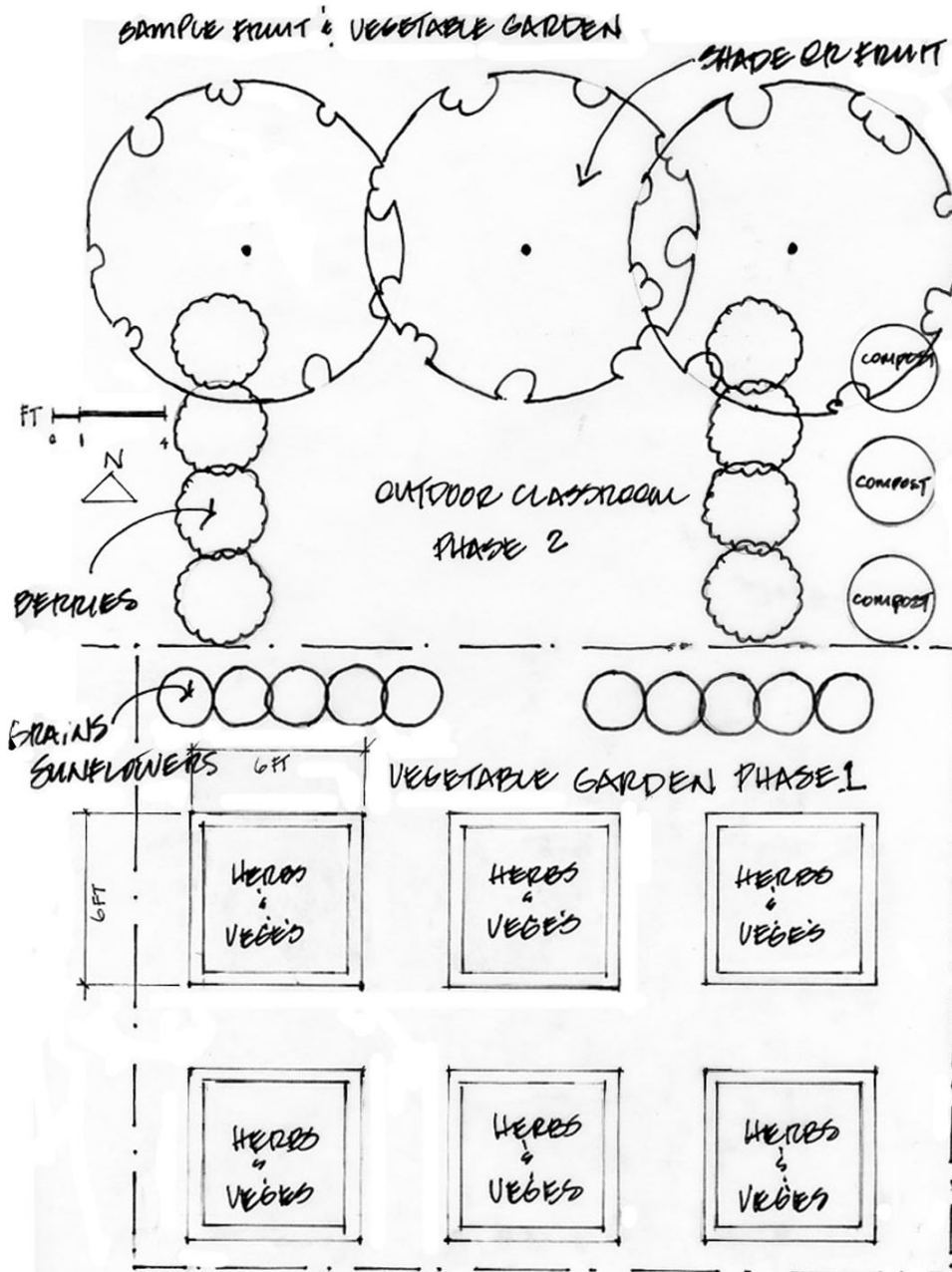
- Ensure the project is well located, i.e.:
  - o near the school building
  - o close to a water supply for plant watering as well as hand washing
  - o with access to parking or a driveway for delivery
  - o receives ample sunlight (at least 6 hrs per day) and
  - o is manageable in size
  - o is away from dumpsters/ garbage bins
  - o doesn't abut a green space due to the presence of higher numbers of rodents
- Fencing may or may not be required and will be decided based on site circumstances by the Principal and Grounds Supervisor.
- Make garden beds accessible to all students. At least part of the garden must be accessible for children with limited mobility (height, surface material and width of pathway).
- Include a secured place to store tools/hoses and materials nearby with a strategy for access to these tools over the summer months. A simple wooden chest / bench that can be locked with a combination lock can work. It is useful for teachers or older students to be able to access simple tools to do garden work without having to find the janitorial staff or other staff each time to unlock tools.
- Drip irrigation using soaker hoses are acceptable. Timers are encouraged (in lock boxes) so as to encourage watering in the early morning.
- Safety first! Avoid trip or slip hazards.
- Avoid vandalism opportunities (including rocks that could be tossed, skateboarding edges, easily broken sculptures, elements that give access to school building roofs)



## Plants

- Consider how plants grow over time and may inhibit pedestrian flow when identifying plant locations.
- Consider how plant debris will be disposed of
- Engage "experts" to flesh out the design. Work with a master gardener, landscape architect or designer. The architect can help with designing "hardscape" areas such as constructed paths or courtyards. A master gardener is particularly knowledgeable about plant selection and placement. You may have garden designers or architects in your school community, who may be willing to volunteer.
- Give careful consideration to edible plants.

### Example of a garden drawing:



## E. Create garden maintenance and management plan

The VBE requires a Long-term Maintenance Plan and Agreement. The following are considerations to include in your maintenance plan.

### Irrigation

1. Develop watering plan: who will water the garden and when? If there is no irrigation, a water source needs to be identified as well as the method to transport water to the garden.
2. If you plan to plant fruit trees then a 3-year watering plan needs to be established.

### Regular up-keep:

1. Have students participate in the seed sowing, planting, weeding, composting, and watering during the school year on a regular basis. If a number of classes are using the garden, it might be helpful to create a schedule for caring for the garden.
2. Establish a summer site management schedule in consultation with school custodians/community volunteers with names and contact information of volunteers and ensure it is distributed to each participant. Procedures, location of keys to access tools, and days attended are important. It's beneficial to keep a gardening journal so volunteers can see what has been done i.e.) fertilizing, weeding, planting etc.
3. Plan for specialty maintenance such as tree replacement, large tree installation or tree pruning. Site preparation requiring large equipment is the responsibility of the VBE Maintenance Dept.
4. Outline your plan for winter maintenance (i.e. cover crops) and spring soil preparation.
5. Describe your plan for compost maintenance to discourage rodents (e.g. using a rodent-proof composter, ensuring cooked foods and/or foods of animal origin are not added).
6. Include a statement acknowledging and adhering to VBE standards including avoiding the use of pesticides, fungicides and herbicides on VBE properties.
7. Include a statement that the group will respond in a timely manner to correct any safety issues created by the garden or any violations to VBE codes.

### Long-term planning

1. Develop a long-term plan for weeding, composting, path maintenance, plant pruning or removing over-grown plants and replacing them, and removing debris from the area.
2. Develop a long-term strategy to keep enthusiasm high among volunteers and to recruit new volunteers.
3. Outline the maintenance schedule for the different seasons.
4. Identify the number of years each committee member commits to maintaining the garden and outline a succession plan. There should be a minimum 3-5 year commitment and plan. The agreement should be reviewed and renewed each year.

## F. Develop a plan for the use of foods produced

### Food Safety Considerations for Harvesting and Using Food \*

1. *At least* one person per school who is involved with the garden and/or food preparation should be Food Safe certified (outside of the cafeteria). This person should be able to consult with others involved in the food related events / food production. Foods need to be prepared following food safe principles.
2. Anyone who is sick should not be involved in food preparation.
3. Anyone involved in harvesting foods should wash their hands before *and* after harvesting produce.
4. Anyone involved in food preparation should wash their hands before doing any food preparation.

\* For information on getting Food Safe certification and on food safety principles, visit [www.foodsafe.ca/](http://www.foodsafe.ca/) and [www.fightbac.org/](http://www.fightbac.org/)

#### A) Additional considerations for kitchens that do not have an operating permit (eg. staff rooms, home economics classrooms)

- washed produce may be donated to school families, charities or food banks
- washed produce may be sold as a fundraiser
- *lower risk foods* can be prepared on site \*
- do not prepare *higher risk foods*\*
- \* For a list of *low risk* and *high risk* foods, please see [www.vch.ca/media/Guidelines\\_Sale\\_Foods\\_Temporary\\_Markets.pdf](http://www.vch.ca/media/Guidelines_Sale_Foods_Temporary_Markets.pdf)

#### B) Additional considerations for kitchens that have a food service operating permit \* (eg. cafeterias, restaurants, other kitchens that have applied to a health inspector and received an operating permit)

- any of the food preparation activities listed above are allowed, and additionally:
- lower risk foods (listed above) may be sold to raise funds (foods must be prepared on site – the produce may not be prepared at home and returned for sale at school)
- produce may be prepared by the cafeteria or a teaching kitchen for sale or for educational purposes
- produce may be prepared for use in the school meal program
- produce may be prepared and used by any class

\* To learn about the process of obtaining a food service operating permit, see the BC Health Act – Food Premises Regulations at [www.foodsafe.ca/downloadfiles/FSFoodservices02-FoodPremReg.pdf](http://www.foodsafe.ca/downloadfiles/FSFoodservices02-FoodPremReg.pdf)  
And the Vancouver Coastal Health website at [www.vch.ca/your\\_environment/food\\_safety/permits/](http://www.vch.ca/your_environment/food_safety/permits/)

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## Step 4. Final approval of application

Submit the complete application to the Grounds Supervisor who will review it to identify potential operations and maintenance issues, installation problems or safety concerns and answer questions or offer resources that you may need to further define the garden design. If the application is approved, you are ready to go to Step 5. If the application is not approved, the grounds supervisor will talk with you about what concerns need to be addressed for final approval to be given.

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## Step 5. Garden Installation

Once the project is approved for construction, funds are raised and available, and all agreements signed and submitted, you are ready to install the garden!! At this point, close coordination between the grounds staff and the garden committee is critical. The committee should have an approved construction schedule and a detailed work plan.

### Implementation:

1. VBE Grounds staff prepare the site for gardening or teachers and students may prepare the site with permission from the VBE Grounds dept (e.g. pull up lawn, delineate plot boundaries)
  2. VBE staff or Students/parents and teachers may prepare garden beds (e.g. add soil amendments or build boxes). Raised beds may be built off-site to VBE standards and installed by VBE maintenance staff.
  3. Implementation will take place within the same school year provided the board has approved the project.
  4. Students must participate in the planting of the garden for each new growing season.
  5. Food must be washed and prepared in a food safe manner prior to eating.
  6. Final inspection. The Grounds Supervisor will complete the final inspection.
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## Step 6. Celebration and Reflection

Congratulations – you've done it. You now have a beautiful food garden - now it's time to **celebrate!** Consider holding a community event for the opening. Neighbours and other community members who have not been directly participating in the project may be excited to get involved once they see the final project!

### Congratulations and happy gardening!

The writing team was Kevin Millsip, VSB Sustainability. Brent Mansfield of Think and Eat Green at School and Sarah Carten at Vancouver Coastal Health. And a big thank you to all of the great food and garden folks, staff and students who provided feedback on for this policy!