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<b>TO:</b>	<b>CHAIR AND MEMBERS COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOODS COMMITTEE MEETING ON MARCH 29, 2011</b>
<b>FROM:</b>	<b>ROSS L. FAIR GENERAL MANAGER OF COMMUNITY SERVICES</b>
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>LONDON'S COMMUNITY GARDENS PROGRAM REVIEW</b>

**RECOMMENDATION**

With regards to the review of London's Community Gardens Program and on the recommendation of the General Manager of Community Services, the following actions **BE TAKEN**:

- i. The Summary of Findings and Areas of Improvement as outlined in Appendix A **BE RECEIVED**; and,
- ii. The Recommendations from this Review as listed in Appendix B **BE ENDORSED**; and,
- iii. Civic administration **BE DIRECTED** to work with community partners and interested stakeholders to implement these recommendations based on the approved 2011 budget for London's Community Gardens Program.

**PREVIOUS REPORTS PERTINENT TO THIS MATTER**

- Community Gardens Program Administrative Service Review (September 14, 2009)

**BACKGROUND**

On September 21, 2009, City Council resolved that the Civic Administration **BE REQUESTED** to report back with respect to additional quantitative information related to the Community Gardens Program, including actual costs and in-kind costs, analysis of whether the funds spent could provide food to those in need in a more effective manner, and information pertaining to food security.

In 2010, Civic Administration undertook a review of the community gardens program with a view to positioning the service for the future within the context of Council's strategic priorities and projects, principally London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy and Poverty Reduction (food security) with a view to reaffirm the City's commitment to the Community Gardens Program and have a renewed Community Gardens Program and administrative structure in place for the future.

The purpose of this report is to provide the findings and the recommendations from the review (see Appendix A and B) and identify next steps to be undertaken in order to implement the recommendations in 2011.

**The Community Gardens Review Process**

The Community Gardens Program Review Process was investigative, consultative and collaborative. The process encompassed the following phases:

Phase One: Understanding the Community Gardens Context

- Facilitated six focus groups with key stakeholder groups from across London. More than 80 Londoners participated in the engagement sessions providing helpful input into this report.
- Conducted a cross-sectional survey questionnaire distributed via Canada Post and email. Over 120 surveys were returned, representing a 22% response rate.
- Conducted interviews with key internal stakeholders in the Community Services Department
- Conducted research and best practices review
- Attended London Community Resource Centre (LCRC) Advisory Group meeting

**Phase Two: Understanding London's Community Gardens' Assets and Needs**

- Facilitated a focus group with the City of London Parks & Recreation team, responsible for maintaining the community gardens
- Conducted several meetings with Linda Davies, Executive Director of London Community Resource Centre (LCRC)
- Undertook an internal review of existing community gardens' practices, processes and policies; culture and structure; services and programs; process management and quality; financial management; and community and public relations

**Phase Three: Development of Recommendations**

- Based on the outcomes of Phase One and Two, a series of recommendations was developed to build upon and enhance London's Community Gardens Program to address the needs of the program now and into the future.

**Community Gardens Review Findings**

The Community Gardens Review identified many trends and forces of change in the environment that reinforce the importance of developing a more complete and comprehensive operational framework to support the development and management of community gardens within the City of London. See Appendix A for a detailed accounting of the Findings, Areas of Improvement and an Overview of Best Practices.

**Community Gardens Review Recommendations**

It is clear that there is untapped opportunity to further develop community gardens in the City of London. Based on research, including focus group and survey feedback, 14 recommendations were identified. See Appendix B for a detailed list of recommendations.

**Next Steps**

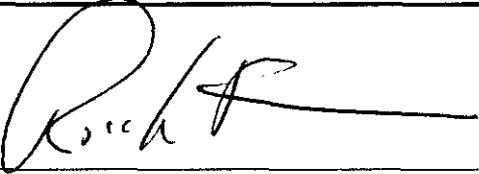
Based on City Council's recommendation, Civic Administration will work with key community stakeholders to develop and implement the recommendations outlined in Appendix B based on the approved 2011 budget for London's Community Gardens Program.

**FINANCIAL IMPACT**

There are no additional resources identified in the 2011 base budget to assist with the implementation of the identified recommendations. Civic Administration and community partners will identify a 2012 budget request to support the implementation of the outstanding recommendations to support the development, management and sustainability of London's Community Gardens Program.

**CONCLUSION**

Community gardens are extremely important and have the ability to improve well being, and create neighbourhood involvement. There are significant tangible benefits associated with successful community gardens including, increased access to fresh, nutritious, low-cost food.

<b>PREPARED AND SUBMITTED BY:</b>	<b>RECOMMENDED BY:</b>
	
<p><b>Cheryl Smith</b>  <b>Manager, Community Partnerships &amp; Funding</b>  <b>Department of Community Services</b></p>	<p><b>Ross L. Fair</b>  <b>General Manager</b>  <b>Department of Community Services</b></p>

- C. Pat McNally, General Manager of Environmental and Engineering Services and City Engineer  
 Bill Coxhead, Director, Parks and Recreation  
 Jay Stanford, Director, Environmental Programs & Solid Waste  
 Andrew McPherson, Manager, Parks Planning and Design  
 Linda Davies, Executive Director, London Community Resource Centre

## APPENDIX A

**2010 COMMUNITY GARDENS PROGRAM REVIEW FINDINGS, AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT AND BEST PRACTICES****FINDINGS:**

The Community Gardens Review identified many trends and forces of change in the environment that reinforce the importance of developing a more complete and comprehensive operational framework to support the development and management of community gardens within the City of London.

**1. Snapshot of London Community Gardens Assets**

Community gardening began in London in 1993 and was operated by several different organizations over the years, including the Middlesex London Health Unit (MLHU). In 2002, the London Community Resource Centre (LCRC) took over and has been managing and overseeing the gardens ever since. The LCRC is a non-profit volunteer driven agency that identifies itself as a community collaborator and facilitator of community projects that promote sustainability and self-sufficiency. In addition to managing the community gardens program the LCRC provides assistance to individuals or agencies interested in establishing Collective Kitchens, provides food demonstrations with the Community Food Advisor program and Healthy Tidbits volunteers. These programs provide options and opportunities to learn how to grow, prepare, preserve and enjoy locally grown, fresh healthy fruits and vegetables.

Since 2006, the City of London has provided annualized core funding to LCRC to support the management of London's Community Gardens Program. LCRC receives all revenues (\$47,000) from the rental of plots, and from a variety of other funders including Service Canada, MLHU, Y.O.U. Summer Services, and London Lawyers. They also undertake their own fundraising activities. The 2010 City of London allocation for the Community Gardens Program was \$38,000, plus provision of office and storage space in a city-owned building. This funding is managed through a service agreement between the City and LCRC and is managed by the Neighbourhood and Children's Services Division.

The City of London's Parks & Recreation Division provides in-kind contributions, including assistance with garden openings, maintenance and seasonal closures, watering and composting services. The City of London's Parks Planning Division works with the community in selecting a site, consultation and any necessary public processes and ongoing liaison with gardeners and the LCRC related to garden issues in parks (by-laws, vandalism, maintenance, etc).

In summary, it is estimated that the City contributes over \$100,000 per year to the Community Gardens program, including funding, supplies, service and staff time.

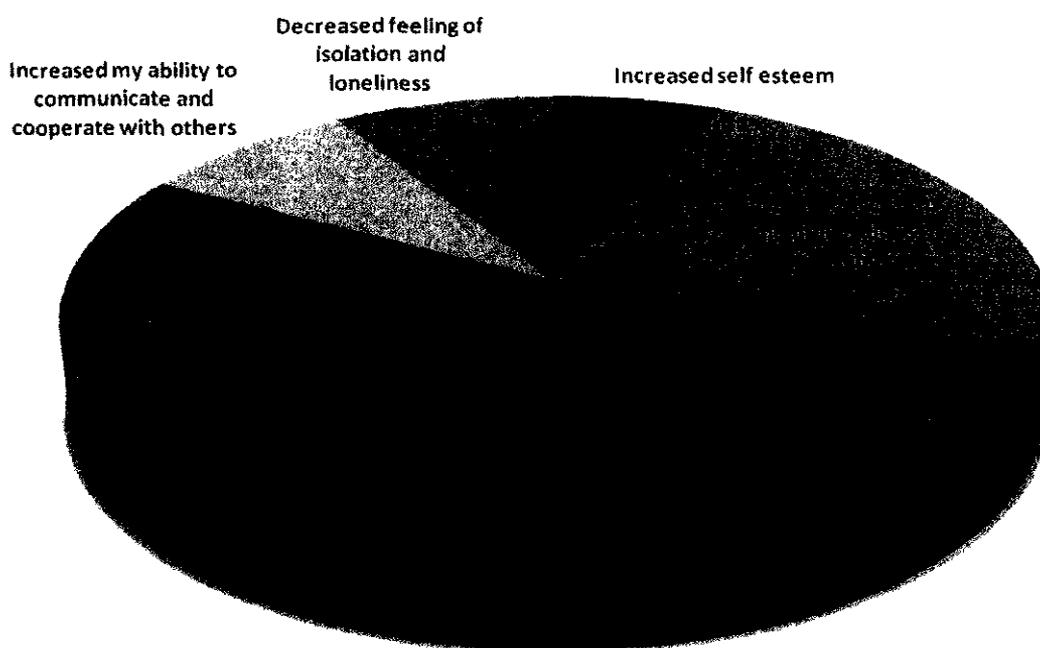
Today, London is home to 21 gardens. There are 600 plots spread across the 21 gardens. Over 600 gardeners are active within these gardens. The gardens are located in neighbourhoods across the city on green space. Just over 75% of the gardens are on City of London property. Five of the community gardens are on private land, with Proudfoot Gardens located on both private and public land. Due to their popularity, all but two newer gardens, Dillabough and University Heights, are at full plot capacity and Carling Heights garden has a waiting list which LCRC is attempting to resolve by ensuring that all gardeners are truly utilizing their plots. Each site offers a shared piece of land where individuals or families may rent garden plots and grow vegetables, fruit and herbs of their choice. All the gardens are grown organically which means no chemical pesticides or herbicides are used. Compost, mulching, crop rotation and companion planting are employed to obtain maximum yield. The community garden plots are approximately 10' by 10', 10' by 20' or 20' by 20' depending on the needs of the gardeners. Additional space is set aside for a composting area and for storing tools and supplies.

**2. Benefits of London's Community Gardens Program**

According to the American Journal of Public Health, "community gardens build and nurture community capacity, which is defined as the sum total of commitment, resources, and skills that a community can mobilize and deploy to address community problems and strengthen community assets and strong community capacity increases the effectiveness and quality of community health interventions" (American Journal of Public Health, 2003). Research also shows that community gardens promote healthy communities and if done properly will contribute to food security for low income families. For London, the benefits of community gardens are diverse and bountiful. Survey results from London gardeners indicate

the following key benefits.

**What benefit/s have you experienced as a result of being part of a Community Garden?** (You may select more than one benefit.)



In summary, community gardens:

- Enhance quality of life for the gardeners
- Provide a catalyst for neighbourhood and community development
- Foster the development of a community identity and spirit
- Bring people together from a wide variety of backgrounds (age, race, culture, social class)
- Add beauty to the community and heighten people's awareness and appreciation for living things
- Create opportunity for recreation, exercise, therapy, and education
- Produce opportunities to earn income and to develop the city's economy
- Provide occasions for intergenerational and cross-cultural connections
- Build community leaders
- Promote environmental stewardship by conserving resources, preserving green space and reducing city heat from streets and parking lots
- Yield nutritious food for individuals and families
- Lower household food budgets
- Increase individual and community self-sufficiency and allow people to access food with dignity

The core advantages of community gardens align with the City of London's Strategic Priorities, specifically: **Community Vitality:** Enhancing a creative, caring and engaged community to assure the health, safety and well-being of individuals and families while promoting livable and inclusive neighbourhoods.

Creating and maintaining a community garden naturally draws neighbours together. The gardens are appreciated as open spaces for mixing and relaxing. Activities like sharing gardening tips, participating in social events and enjoying the produce unite people of all ages and from all walks of life, nurturing a resilient, more integrated urban community and increasing civic engagement.

**Environmental Leadership:** Valuing our natural heritage and environment to protect a healthy and sustainable environment and encourage an environmentally-sensitive city.

Community gardens provide opportunity for renewal away from the intensity of our urban realities. Community gardens model the way in land stewardship. They:

- Utilize and teach organic gardening techniques
- Protect green space from development
- Make open spaces available to the public

- Reinforce the importance of using the land to grow nutritious, non-processed food

Focus Group and Survey responses indicated strong support for the environmental benefits of community gardening. One gardener wrote about the simple things we take for granted in life and that gardens help to ground us. *"We had bees, butterflies and all kinds of birds in abundance. We collected Elderberries that we grew as a permanent planting and made the most fantastic jam. My friends were totally unaware of the possibility that a simple bush that is just sitting there and no one notices it could have a food potential. One of the other gardeners told me that his work college was convinced his tomato plants had a growth on them until it was explained that the green blobs were unripe tomatoes! So simple the things we take for granted."*

**Economic Prosperity:** Creating an environment for a resilient, diversified and inclusive economy to accelerate the growth of a strong and vibrant economy and foster private sector investment in the city.

Community gardening promotes social equity through its focus on food security and opportunity. It enables gardeners to grow their own food and enhance their nutrition, improving their health. For many gardeners of limited financial means, a community garden plot helps establish food self-sufficiency instead of reliance on food subsidies. A 200-square-foot plot that is intensively gardened can produce around 150 pounds of fresh vegetables each year. According to our research, the gardeners value eating fresh food and sharing with their friends and families. One gardener wrote that her garden produced more than what she could consume so she shared her garden harvest with friends and neighbours.

### Community Gardens' Stakeholders & Interests

In London, there is a committed and passionate group of stakeholders involved and/or interested in community gardens. We reached out to these groups early in the process to ensure that their input and ideas helped to shape the results of our study. Key stakeholder groups include:

- i. Local gardeners
- ii. Community members surrounding the community gardens
- iii. Community members at large
- iv. Community partners, such as:
  - The London and Area Food Bank
  - Participation House
  - Children's Aid Society
  - YMCA
  - Community and Resource Centres
  - Educational Institutions and Boards of Education
- v. Volunteers and summer students
  - 25 volunteers
  - 5 summer students
- vi. City of London
  - Parks and Recreation
  - Planning and Development
  - Neighbourhood and Children's Services
- vii. Community Garden advocates and supporters
  - Post Carbon London
  - Master Gardeners
- viii. London Community Resource Centre

Within the stakeholder groups, there is a diverse range of needs and priorities that must be addressed as part of the review. The needs and priorities can be allocated into six categories:

#### 1. Gardening

These gardeners come to garden and to work in their own plot. They typically share their food with their families and in some cases get involved with local groups to share their produce. Accordingly, their focus is on their own plot within the garden. According to the survey, 50% of the London gardeners garden by themselves and one other and 30% garden alone. 80% of the gardeners garden at least 2 times per week with 38% gardening more than two times. In fact, some noted that they garden ten times per week and even twice a day.

#### 2. Community building

These gardeners want to garden and to build relationships within their community garden and also see the benefits associated with reaching out to the community at large. These people want to promote their own garden as a place for people to come and visit and also are very interested in promoting gardens within the

city and have ambitious goals in relation to growing the community garden initiative within London and to making London a stronger and more vital city.

### 3. Skill building focus

Teaching others to garden and inviting community members to learn and participate in the community garden is an important component of community gardens. There are many gardeners who are prepared to share their knowledge and there is a significant number of individuals who need and want to learn to garden so that they can improve their situation, particularly when food shortage is an issue.

### 4. Advocacy

There is a key stakeholder group that is committed to advocating for the role that community gardens can play in food security, environmental stewardship and neighbourhood renewal.

### 5. Relationship Focus

These gardeners want to garden and at the same time connect with other people within their community who are also gardening. They desire to learn more about gardening and to build lasting relationships within their neighbourhood.

### 6. Specialized Focus

These gardens are designed around the unique attributes or needs of a particular group, including culture, language, special needs, and interests. In some instances these gardens are located on land owned by an agency, association or organization. Although, the owner is prepared to manage and oversee the garden, they welcome support from a coordinating agency to assist with planning, training and general start-up. An excellent example of a specialized garden is the *Participation House garden located at Thames Garden*. Their experience has been overwhelmingly positive, reaping many benefits, such as:

- Herbs, vegetables and flowers were shared with families of Participation House. Some of these families have limited resources and were very appreciative of the food shared.
- Vegetables were used weekly in lunch preparation, fresh salads and herbs in cooking and healthy eating education.
- Gardens allowed a spot for some of the day program participants to have access to fresh air as some individuals live in apartment settings.
- Sunflowers attracted birds. This allowed individuals with visual impairments to hear the birds on site.
- Raised garden beds were able to provide access to individuals in wheelchairs and the herbs in these gardens were beneficial for people with visual impairments to provide aroma sensory.
- Gardens provided a source of access to the community for meeting new people and gave people a sense of pride and accomplishment.

### Garden Organizational Structures

Based on the stakeholder needs and requirements listed above, eight different types of gardens could evolve as listed below.

#### *Block Club Gardens*

These gardens are structured by an advocate and operated by gardeners who live close by. There are usually ten gardeners per site, and there is not a lot of structure.

#### *Citizen Gardens*

These are designed to foster identity or commitment by the community. Often, they are very small and are focused on promoting neighbourhood pride and beautification.

#### *Established Gardens*

These gardens have a long history and a primary volunteer unit runs the garden and its various programs. They usually have a community outreach component. They are typically rental plots with waiting lists due to their popularity. While members reside in the neighbourhood, established gardens attract people from a larger area.

#### *Government Gardens*

Controlled and operated by a government agency, a government garden promotes engagement of community volunteers (individuals and gardening clubs) to garden at its site. The government agency is responsible for maintenance and appearance.

#### *Mission Gardens*

These provide a service to the broad-based community, such as growing produce for a Food Pantry, local



food bank or Collective Kitchen; or a teaching garden. They are usually organized and coordinated by an advocacy, faith-based or municipal organization.

#### *School Gardens*

These gardens are aligned to the school's programming and are found on school grounds. Students will have an active role in the garden. School gardens can be maintained by the school or by an outside organization that oversees the garden for the school.

#### *Youth Gardens*

These offer extracurricular programming for youth, and the garden's focus is on adding value for the young people. In this case, the "community" is the youth.

#### *Institutional Gardens*

Like youth and school gardens, these gardens serve clients of a social service organization – and often come from varying parts of the city (i.e., homeless shelter, battered women's shelter, nursing home garden, Participation House, etc.). The garden is organized and run on behalf of these clients. It may or may not have programming.

### **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:**

Focus group feedback, surveys and analysis of the current program identified some key areas for improvement in the current Community Gardens Program.

#### 1. Vision, Partnerships and Planning

A clear and compelling vision for London's Community Gardens Program is not shared between LCRC, City of London and the key stakeholder groups, including gardeners, volunteers, partners, London residents and others. Vision creates clarity and focus and in turn provides a program with direction and purpose. Without a shared vision a program will struggle to meet community need and outcomes and an organization implementing the program will not know how to align resources effectively. Since a shared vision, guiding principles and strategic plan for London's Community Gardens Program is not defined, LCRC does not work from a recognized business plan that aligns resources to the highest priorities, which include operations, community development, partnerships, volunteer engagement, growth and sustainability. Accordingly, the following gaps exist:

- There is no plan for setting up new community gardens in direct alignment to neighbourhoods, particularly the needs of vulnerable neighbourhoods. In the majority of situations, the garden plots are being gardened by individuals or individual families with little community involvement or recognition of how a community garden could build the capacity of a neighbourhood.
- There is no strategy or mandate to integrate or align London's Community Gardens Program to other City of London community-based initiatives. 35% of survey respondents agree that the City of London needs to be more involved in the Community Gardens Program.
- The focus groups revealed that there is tremendous opportunity for building value-added partnerships with community groups but this is not an identified priority within the existing resource budget. For example, a representative attended a focus group from Brescia College and identified that Brescia would like to partner to establish a teaching garden on Brescia's property. However, in order to take on these community garden and development roles, potential partners, such as Brescia, require support from LCRC in the areas of start-up, training and operations. They also need to understand how to set goals for the garden and to sustain it well into the future. Due to resource scarcity, it is difficult for LCRC to give this area of opportunity sufficient attention.
- There is little public awareness or engagement of London residents in the development of London's Community Gardens Program. A sample survey of 50 random individuals to assess their knowledge of what community gardens are and the benefits to London and our residents, showed overwhelmingly there was very little to no understanding.

#### 2. Structure and Communication

The organizational structure and resources to support the 21 community gardens within London is lean. There is not sufficient human resource capacity to support both the operational or community development needs and opportunities associated with London's Community Gardens Program. The LCRC operates with one Executive Director (ED) who manages the entire operation and is dedicated to improving the day-to-day operations of the community gardens. In addition, throughout the summer months a small team of summer students is available to assist with garden details. Previously, there was also a Coordinator role focused on garden management who had specialized knowledge in gardening, however this role was eliminated due to funding constraints. The loss of this role has left a significant gap from both an expertise and communication perspective.

As the number of community gardens grows it will be increasingly difficult to plan, manage and build sustainability with the current management structure. It will become increasingly important to engage volunteers, to investigate other models of community garden management and to access additional outside resources to support sustainability and growth.

3. Operations and Processes

Currently the gardens are managed through a centralized process by LCRC. It is responsible for managing key activities within the Community Gardens Program process, including:

- Organizing and managing the personal information of the gardeners
- Communicating with gardeners regarding upcoming events, and news
- Collecting plot rental fees from all gardeners
- Registering gardeners, including the associated documentation (this process received high marks in the survey)
- Opening and closing the gardens
- General oversight of the day-to-day operations of the gardens
- Growth and development of community gardens
- Community development

Although, numerous focus group participants would like to manage the community garden on their own, the majority of gardeners believe there is a need for a centralized agency to oversee the operations and administration of the London Community Gardens Program and infrastructure. Respondents agree there are many opportunities for important process and operational improvements, despite recognized enhancements that were implemented over the last year. Opportunities for improvement include the following:

- Effective and timely communication processes and protocols. According to the survey results, over 75% of the gardeners would attend quarterly communication meetings, and would attend gardener focused workshops.
- Community development and making community gardens an integral part of a neighbourhood nurtured and sustained by the people living in the area
- Consistent policies and procedures. Over 75% of the survey participants would like to see *someone coordinating activities at their garden in a consistent manner.*
- Streamlined operational processes and protocols
- Clear roles and responsibilities: city, agency, gardeners, volunteers, other stakeholders, etc.
- Establishing value-added partnerships with suppliers, community agencies and corporate partners

4. City of London Parks & Recreation Role

The Parks and Recreation Division has worked with Community Gardens since the inception. They are highly skilled and have the commitment and necessary equipment to perform key tasks within the gardens, such as general maintenance, watering and opening and closing of gardens. Much of the work they provide is "in kind." Unlike the city's role in maintaining other services, such as a sheet of ice at \$150.00 per hour, they do not have any established annual budget assigned to the community gardens work which puts a significant strain on their planning and resources.

5. Garden Plot Fee Structure

Garden plots are rented on a geared-to-income basis, allowing affordability for every interested gardener. The cost of an annual plot rental is as follows:

Household Income	Annual Fee
Up to \$15,000	\$16.00
\$16,000 - \$20,000	\$25.00
\$21,000 - \$24,000	\$35.00
Over \$24,000	\$40.00

The fee structure is outdated and not reflective of today's social or economic environment. Furthermore, because the fee structure is aligned to annual income, it is difficult to assess the accuracy of the application of the fee structure. Based on the feedback from the survey 50% of the respondents annual income is less than \$20,000 while 50% of the respondents earn greater than \$40,000. Accordingly, it is critical to analyze and develop a new fee structure and process for managing payment of fees.

## 6. Resource Partners

Resource Partners are critical to the success of community gardens. Currently, LCRC obtains various supplies from generous partners who want to help the Community Gardens Program. There are also other agencies in London and beyond that are prepared to assist the community gardens and gardeners. However, the LCRC Executive Director's time is fully utilized and she has little time to leverage all of these opportunities. For example, the Master Gardeners association has approximately 30 volunteers and they have identified community gardens as a top priority. Unfortunately, there is no plan to engage this association in the community gardens processes on a go-forward basis and thus, there is a risk that this opportunity could be lost.

### **BEST PRACTICES REVIEW:**

Findings from the review of Community Garden Programs within Canada, the United States and England identified the following trends:

- Community Garden structural models normally fall into three categories:
  - A nonprofit organization supporting community gardens
  - A city program supporting community gardens
  - An informal network of community gardens
- The most secure models are community garden programs owned by the municipality or publicly funded, with a municipal department or non-profit agency serving all community gardens in a city
- Government is typically involved in either establishing a city-run program or in partnership with a community garden organization
- Community gardens are deemed to play important roles in developing community capacity and educating residents about healthy eating and the environment
- Municipalities view community gardening as an important means to help a city meet the goals of its comprehensive plan in a cost-effective manner. They identify community gardens as needing comparatively few dollars and resources to enable a dynamic and engaged community.
- An extensive alliance of interested partners (i.e. city, agency, volunteers, stakeholders, etc.) is vital to build community gardens capacity

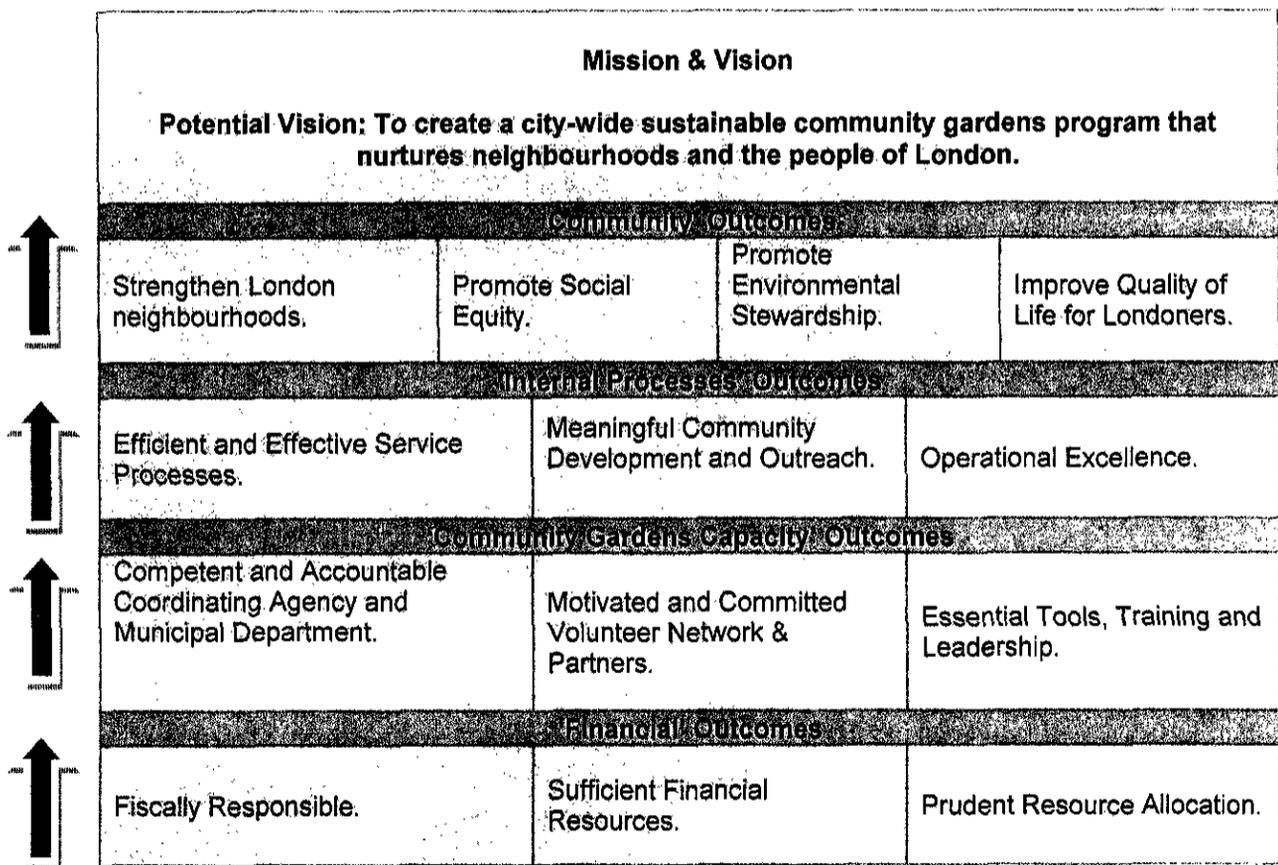
**APPENDIX B**

**2010 COMMUNITY GARDENS PROGRAM REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is clear that there is untapped opportunity to further develop community gardens in the City of London. Based on research, including focus group and survey feedback, the following objectives for London's Community Gardens Program were identified:

- To sustain existing and identify and develop potential community garden sites in direct alignment to the City of London's strategic plans and to the needs of community residents, seniors, faith groups, cooperative housing, hospitals, schools, daycare centres, corporations and other community groups, for the establishment of community gardens.
- To nurture a diverse group of partners, contributors and users, including individual gardeners, families, groups, and neighbourhoods, and to develop a self-sustaining community gardens volunteer base.
- To provide the tools, leadership and horticultural and maintenance training to the various community groups and partners.
- To promote quality care of London community gardens.
- To provide technical assistance for the groups who participate in the stewardship of community gardens that reside on public lands.
- To foster City participation and encourage neighbourhood revitalization while preserving open space.
- To ensure appropriate funding and support is provided to London's Community Gardens Program.

These objectives translate nicely into the following balanced scorecard strategy map which clearly articulates what must be achieved financially and from an organizational capacity and internal processes perspective, in order to achieve the community outcomes and the Vision and Mission for London's Community Gardens Program.



To support the objectives outlined above, the following fourteen recommendations should be considered:

1. 'Ownership'

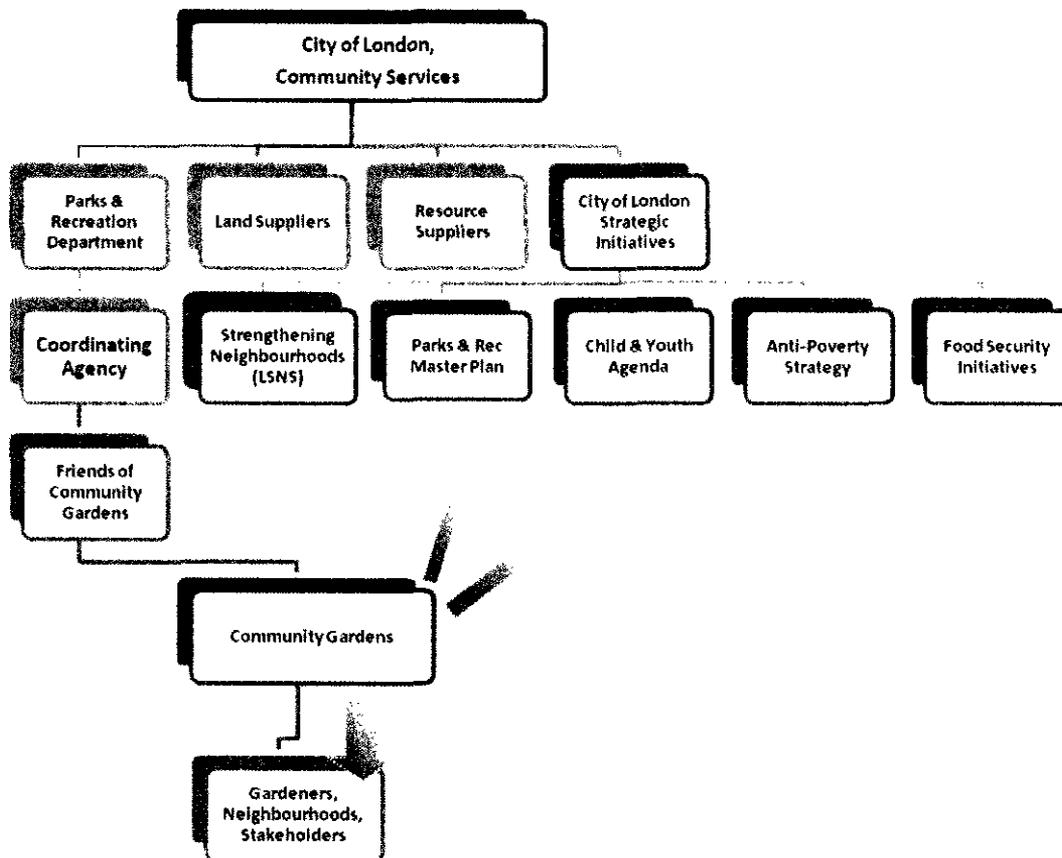
City of London should assume arms-length 'ownership' of the Community Gardens Program and the overall vision and strategy for the Community Gardens Program, in direct alignment to the City's priorities. Ownership in this context means that the City of London has accountability for:

- Developing the strategic plan and overarching vision for community gardens within London, in collaboration with the coordinating agency and London residents and stakeholder groups.

- Selection of the Lead Coordinating Agency, via an RFP process, responsible for coordinating the Community Gardens Program.
- Protection of data, records and documentation related to the Community Gardens Program.
- Legal processes and lease agreements.
- Funding to support London's Community Gardens Program to sustain the benefits of community gardens within the city.
- Allocating available public land to community gardens and aligning the Community Gardens Strategy to City of London priorities and key initiatives, such as London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy, Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Child and Youth Agenda initiatives.

2. Operating Framework

Implement a Community Gardens Operating Structure and Model that clearly depicts the relationships between the stakeholders. City of London maintains strategic ownership of the Community Gardens Program in direct alignment to the City of London's strategic priorities, with linkages to the city's key strategic plans and initiatives. The Coordinating Agency operates and manages the Community Gardens Program and establishes a Friends of Community Gardens Volunteer Network. The Coordinating Agency works in close collaboration with the City of London Community Services and Planning and Development departments, land suppliers and resource suppliers to optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of the Community Gardens Program and to maximize outcomes. The community gardeners / gardening groups are at the core of our model and the program supports their needs and requirements.



3. Strategic Action Plan

The City of London should ensure a Strategic Action Plan for Community Gardens, in collaboration with stakeholder groups, is developed. Establish the Community Gardens Program as a strategic driver of Community Vitality, Environmental Leadership and Economic Prosperity.

The benefits of establishing the Community Gardens Program as a Strategic Driver are far reaching, ranging from healthy eating and personal achievement to helping to create a community renaissance. Community gardens can also be a dynamic tool to assist in making significant contributions to poverty reduction and food security within London Ontario. Therefore, it is necessary to anchor the community gardens within the foundation of the City's strategic vision and plan. Accordingly, the City of London must take a leadership role and be clear on how they see community gardens fitting into the overall strategic plan and what specific outcomes the Community Gardens Program will produce.

**Immediate Opportunities:**

- Integrate Community Gardens into existing strategic initiatives such as London Strengthening Neighbourhoods Strategy, Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Child and Youth Agenda initiatives.
- Planning and Development's Parks Planning and Design Division should include community gardens as standard amenities in design of new parks.
- The Parks and Recreation Division should identify the needs associated with supporting community gardens and identify a budget line which allocates sufficient funds to the project.
- Integrate the community gardens information into the City of London website. Communities and or individuals interested in starting a garden or managing a plot should be able to access information from the City of London's website.
- The City should provide long-term, low cost leases and license agreements for organizations prepared to lease land for the purpose of operating and maintaining a community garden (i.e. community gardens operated by an association, commercial organization or community based organization, such as a church) on municipal lands. These gardens must adhere to the principles of community gardens.

4. Vision & Guiding Principles

Develop a Vision and Guiding Principles for London's Community Gardens Program. The following concepts should inform development of the vision and principles.

**Potential Vision:**

To create a city-wide sustainable community gardens program that nurtures neighbourhoods and the people of London.

**Potential Guiding Principles:**

- Enrich community involvement and development
- Are flexible and meet the diverse needs of neighbourhoods, gardeners and stakeholders
- Are accessible and inclusive, not exclusive
- Provide membership to City of London residents only
- Offer multiple membership levels at a reasonable fee that is sufficient to sustain the garden
- Are directed by an over-arching set of policies and procedures and stakeholder accountabilities (i.e. accountabilities of gardeners, volunteers, partners, the City, etc.)
- Incorporate resources for training, networking, and technical assistance of individuals and groups to build self-reliance and interdependence
- Are leased to gardeners who are prepared to commit at least twelve hours annually to the cultivation and maintenance of the garden plot

5. Funding

The City of London should continue to provide annual funding to the Community Gardens Strategy to support the Community Gardens Program coordination, as delivered by an external agency. The budget should be reviewed and adjusted on an annual basis to ensure the desired outcomes and goals are achieved. In addition, the City Council should allocate appropriate funding to internal budget lines in the Community Services Departmental budget to support critical maintenance needs and seasonal / new garden openings and closings. Best practices also identify an opportunity for outside fundraising: an annual Fund Development Plan, driven by the "Friends of Community Gardens" (a volunteer network) to identify outside resources, partners etc. to build and sustain a community gardens program.

6. Coordinating Agency

City of London should engage an external agency, via an official Request for Proposal process, to coordinate the Community Gardens Program (Coordinating Agency), with direct accountability for:

- Day-to-day operations and troubleshooting.
- Consistent application of policies and procedures across all gardens.
- Facilitation of new garden openings.
- Training and development.
- Exploration of public/public and public/private partnership opportunities to maximize resources.
- Development and oversight of community partnerships.
- Consistent and value-added communication with key stakeholders, such as City of London stakeholders, Community Gardeners, Suppliers and Partners.
- Provide outreach to under-served and special needs groups.



## 7. Request for Proposal

City of London should facilitate a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) process to engage the Coordinating Agency for implementation in 2012. The LCRC would continue in that role for 2011. The RFP should provide direction and an understanding of the strategy in relation to the City of London's strategic plan. It must identify key accountabilities, expectations and deliverables required. The potential coordinating agency must have a history of successful community development initiatives, knowledge of community gardening as well as proven financial management and sufficient resources to manage and grow the program. Agencies would bid on the contract as per the following requirements.

Strategic Plan. Show evidence of how a comprehensive 2011-2015 Strategic Plan for Community Gardens within London will be built.

- Engage the City of London and key stakeholders when developing the plan.
- The plan must establish a vision, mission, goals and outcomes, and identify financial resources including fund development strategies.
- The plan must identify key priorities and projects from 2011 – 2015.

Structure. The operating structure must include individuals with different expertise including gardening, community development and project management.

Areas of Focus. To maximize tangible outcomes, the Coordinating Agency must provide evidence of leadership, support and resources in the following areas:

### Operations Management

- Manage the day-to-day operations of the gardens.
- Registration.
- Opening and Closing.
- On-going maintenance and communication / problem solving.

### Awareness and Training

- Create awareness in the community regarding community gardens.
- Develop toolkits to be used by key stakeholders such as: communities who want to start a garden; new gardeners; and gardening protocol; and how tos.
- Organize workshops and learning opportunities for new and returning gardeners.

### Special Project Coordination

- Work with outside agencies to build solutions with community gardens as a tool to support the desired outcome. For example, Community Centres, post-secondary Institutions, corporations, etc.
- Work with volunteers to establish on-going support. Align volunteers to projects. Example: Master Gardeners.

## 8. Friends of the Community Gardens

The Coordinating Agency should establish a "Friends of the Community Gardens" Volunteer Network. The network's role would be to assist the Coordinating Agency with the following key accountabilities:

- Fundraising and fund development to augment the existing annual funds.
- Training and mentoring of new gardeners and support for the implementation of new community gardens.
- Community and neighbourhood outreach.
- Special projects or initiatives.
- Garden maintenance.
- Garden level volunteer coordination: one person volunteers from each garden to be the Community Garden Representative with the primary responsibility being to liaise with the Coordinating Agency.

## 9. Community Planning and Development

Work with City of London representatives and the private sector to integrate community gardens into existing parks and subdivisions, using the Garden Organizational Structures as a guideline. Additionally, partner with private organizations and other non-profit organization in an effort to grow the community gardens within London. For specialty gardens, identify gardens that should be designated specialty gardens. Specialty gardens include gardens designated for teaching or facilitating a special project.

## 10. Membership Fee Structure

Review and develop a responsible Garden Plot Membership Fee Structure that reflects the diversity of Londoners and the contrasting needs of our community gardens. The membership fee should cover the



costs associated with plot rental, water, and maintenance, a starter package of seeds and education seminars and support. The fee structure should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

### 11. Policy and Procedure Manual

Standardized policies, procedures and accountabilities should be developed to support London's Community Gardens Program and should be accessible via the internet. The policies, procedures and accountabilities should be broken into the following categories, and identified by stakeholder group whenever applicable:

- Administration
- Legal (i.e. land leases)
- Community
- Education / Training
- Enterprise
- Finance
- People
- General Governance
- Relationships with Partners, as they pertain to land use
- Gardens and Garden Sites (i.e. maintenance, planting)

### 12. Process Standardization

To ensure efficiency, operational processes and systems must be developed to ensure proficient customer-centred processes. The key processes that need to be addressed include:

- Maintenance process
- Registration process
- Opening and Closing process
- Communicating with gardeners
- Gardening protocol and ground rules
- Orientation process
- Social networking process
- Community awareness process
- Community development process

The following guidelines should be adhered to when developing the processes:

- Processes must be seamless and easy to navigate.
- Decisions should be based on a series of criteria including: gardener experience, preferences and transportation or physical barriers.
- Agency staff should be accessible on-line, in person and on the phone.
- Agency staff should be responsive to the diverse needs of the stakeholders and customers.
- Processes must be user-friendly and flexible.

In addition, a standardized toolkit should be developed that can be used by all stakeholder groups to implement and manage a community garden. For example, this resource will be utilized by groups establishing new gardens, such as universities, churches, associations or commercially-based companies. For example, Brescia College is interested in setting up a Teaching Garden on their property but require direction on how to get started and how to ensure success. Accordingly, Brescia would utilize this toolkit to assist them in the planning and implementation stage.

### 13. Website

Build a Community Gardens website that is housed on the City of London website and encompasses the following information:

- About Us
- Map of Gardens
- Policies
- News, etc.
- Toolkits and brochures
- Orientation and training information
- Special events and training seminars
- Blog and social networking links
- Processes, such as Registration Process & Fee Structure

### 14. Allotment Gardens

There is a rising appreciation of the need for cities to counteract issues of food security and climate change through improved self-sufficiency. Allotment gardens and urban agriculture is a response to these issues and also to food price inflation and a desire to lessen food miles. Although available land is not plentiful in London, allotment gardens are still a valuable opportunity to address, in collaboration with advocates, developers and key stakeholder groups. Accordingly, the City should identify Allotment Gardens as an opportunity for future consideration and initiate a project team, inclusive of community stakeholders, to review and make recommendations for future development