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Submission: Sustainable Communities Plan for Chippendale

The Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network offers its support-in-principle to the Sustainable Streets and Communities Plan for Chippendale. We wish to comment on specific aspects of the plan—food production/distribution and social design—and to make recommendations on these.

We believe the plan has value in:

- being the first of its type in Australia
- approximating a whole systems thinking approach to urban development
- demonstrating innovation in community involvement in urban planning
- contributing to the practice of urban agriculture, particularly to the voluntary community form of practice
- scaling-up and integrating local government technologies in the area.

The plan focuses on the deployment of infrastructure so as to make Chippendale a demonstration site for sustainability technologies and design ideas. If anything could be improved it is a social design component that would recreate the footpath and open space in the neighbourhood as places where people gather—the footpath as destination rather than thoroughfare. The footpath gardens have started this repurposing of the urban footpath.

1. Develop third places to increase sociability

Australian placemaking consultant, David Engwicht, says that places gain enhanced social value when pedestrian traffic is slowed by creating linger nodes where people stop and spend a little time. This brings increased sociability and can help in reducing the social alienation from the neighbourhood experienced by some on account of a lack of local opportunity for social contact.

The US academic, Ray Oldenberg, wrote of the need for free or low cost places where people can informally meet... places other than the home and workplace. Based on time spent in them, he calls these 'third places' after the home, the first place, and the workplace, the second place. Australian social researcher, Hugh Mackay, has also identified the need for informal meeting places that are easily accessible.

The area of Chippendale the focus of the plan is served by third places in the form of a couple cafes and the Peace Park open space.

The Sustainable Streets and Communities Plan could be improved by the addition of a component addressing the need for additional third places or improvements to those existing.

Recommendation

The sustainable Chippendale community, preferably with the cooperation of the City of Sydney, identify locations with potential as third places.

2. Local food systems

The plan proposes to increase the availability of locally-produced food through increasing opportunities for growing locally and sourcing healthy food from suppliers.

The value of food produced within the region it is consumed in has been recognised by planners, citizens, councils and the UN as well as in the University of Melbourne document, supported by VicHealth and the national Heart Foundation, *Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design*.

Regional food production in the greater Sydney area supports a viable regional food economy which, according to Dr Frances Parker at UWS, is worth around \$1billion annually and supports around 12,000 Sydney jobs throughout the food supply chain (*Local Food, Local Economy*, Sydney Food Fairness Alliance http://sydneyfoodfairness.org.au/blog/category/resources/discussion_papers/).

Of more immediate value to the Chippendale plan are the findings of the Victorian Eco Innovation Lab at the University of Melbourne, which disclosed that for the average Australian household:

- 50 percent of water use is attributable to their food choices; this includes water used in agriculture and food processing
- 28 percent of greenhouse gas emissions is attributable to the food supply chain
- 47 percent of waste to landfill is of organic origin and consists largely of food wastes.

It is in these areas that local food production in Chippendale and the reinstallation of an improved community composting system in Peace Park, to supply plant nutrient to the footpath gardens and to householders, would have greatest potential.

Food production

Food production in Chippendale is limited by the availability of space for food gardens and shading by trees and buildings.

At present, a limited amount of food is produced in the footpath gardens on Myrtle and Shepherd streets. These produce a mix of vegetables, herbs and citrus fruits. Even were the footpath gardens to be expanded, the volume of food that could be produced would still remain limited in comparison to the food needs of the population of Chippendale. In part, this is due to the narrow footpaths of the area. Observation based on visits to footpath gardens in other areas, with wider footpaths and footpath food gardens, supports this observation.

Food distribution

Although no research is known to confirm it in Chippendale, it is likely that Chippendale's food supply is dominated by supermarkets in the nearby big box shopping mall in Glebe. The probability of this is based on observation in other areas that shows that big supermarkets disadvantage small food businesses and limit their potential for growing their market through supermarket discounting, bulk buying, supplier market dominance, free parking and advertising.

There are few alternative food sources in Chippendale although there is a distribution point for the weekly, organic food box supplied by the social enterprise, Sydney Food Connect, which sources foods from Sydney region farmers.

Were Chippendale's footpath gardens to be made more productive through improved horticultural practices and soils, it would be possible for a supply, though limited, of commonly eaten food types to be produced.

There appears to be little space available for community food gardens although there may be potential for community gardens structured as container gardens on paved surfaces where there is space. Essentially, this is what the raised footpath gardens on Shepherd Street are at a smaller scale.

Developments such as this could go ahead under the City of Sydney Community Garden Policy, which supports footpath community gardens.

A successful model of a community container garden exists in Adelaide.

Recommendations

That the Sustainable Streets and Communities Plan be amended to include:

1. Funding of research to identify opportunities for the establishment of small food services businesses in Chippendale, perhaps through a grant from City of Sydney.
2. Promotion of the Sydney Food Connect food box scheme in City of Sydney media.
3. Assessment, were there to be local demand, of potential sites for a community container food garden, perhaps in the grounds of the Pine Street Creative Arts Centre or in the open space between Peace Park and the adjacent cafe.

2. Footpath gardens

Footpath food gardens are an element within the practice of urban agriculture that are instigated and managed by the voluntary community sector. Urban agriculture spans the initiatives of the voluntary community sector, which includes home, community and footpath food gardens to the commercial market gardens found within Sydney's suburbs (three in Rockdale LGA, three cojoined market gardens in Randwick LGA) and in the periurban zone of our city.

Councils, such as City of Sydney, City of Yarra, Waverley Council, Marrickville Council and Randwick City Council have footpath gardens within their local government area (LGA) and some have or are developing policy to enable them. The practice of footpath gardening is in its prototyping phase with different ideas being trialled. The footpath gardens along Myrtle and Shepherd streets, which have been made possible under the Community Garden Policy, have provided the means for the prototyping of community-managed footpath community gardens within the limitations of the inner urban area.

The social and placemaking values of footpath gardens

Footpath gardens change the public footpath from thoroughfare to destination.

This brings significant advantages to a neighbourhood.

The footpath gardens:

- **increase human presence** on the street through acting as 'linger nodes' and, thus, increasing the passive surveillance important to public safety
- **enhance opportunity** for both planned and unplanned interaction, increasing opportunity for sociability and the perception of commonality of residence
- **increase cooperation and social capital** skills among local people in their maintenance
- create a new way for **citizens to interact with the public domain** commons by taking some responsibility for it
- **provide learning opportunities** in managing the gardens; in Chippendale, community educators have led walking tours of the gardens and of the species found there
- the Chippendale gardens have been used in association with TAFE for **rehabilitation and resocialisation** purposes.

Learnings

Learnings from footpath gardening to date include the need to design access to the street to vehicles, to cross the street, to move wheelie bins and to keep sight lines to the footpath open so as to maintain public safety. The Chippendale gardens are supported by a local community team that maintains the gardens and the community compost bins adjacent to the footpath gardens on Shepherd Street.

Learnings from the Randwick City Council footpath Foragers' Garden outside its Barrett House sustainability and community centre include the advisability of interpretive signage explaining to passers-by the reasons for the garden and how they can interact with it, and the necessity to consider aesthetics and visual ambience in selection of planting material

<http://reduceyourfootprint.com.au/blog/ripping-time-on-barrett-house-footpath-day-1/>

<http://reduceyourfootprint.com.au/blog/day-2-ripping-time-as-gardeners-create-edible-fo/>).

The idea of gardening the public footpath is gaining wider acceptance. Its potential in Chippendale is limited by the number of people who would make and maintain the gardens. Care will be needed to ensure that any community footpath garden group does not become too ambitious and exceed its capacity to manage the gardens.

Recommendations

1. Include in the Sustainable Streets and Communities Plan the opportunity to expand footpath gardening as demand and maintenance capacity of local people makes possible.
2. Retrofit the existing Myrtle Street footpath gardens with smooth access to the street around 1.2m wide for aged pedestrians with walking aids to access the street and for residents to move their wheelie bins and to access the street.
3. To ensure the supply of plant nutrient material, consider reinstalling the Peace Park community composting system if there is local demand and provide support through the City of Sydney in group establishment and governance, training and equipment so that it would be self-managing.
4. Extend the trellis supporting the plantings of espaliered fruit trees in Peace Park to increase productivity and demonstrate the use of edible vegetation in landscape design.
5. Provide street seating adjacent to the footpath gardens to increase sociability and provide places for people to linger on the footpath.
6. If there is demand and community capacity, install durable vertical gardens on fences and walls at Pine Street Creative Arts Centre and at other locations, of the type currently being prototyped at Barrett House sustainability education and community centre in Randwick:
<http://reduceyourfootprint.com.au/blog/at-barrett-house-food-is-climbing-up-the-walls/>
7. Modify the City of Sydney Tree Management Plan to permit the planting of edible trees as street trees and to permit communities to plant species other than those on the Plan's preferred planting list. This would bring the Plan into alignment with current community practice.

Regards

Russ Grayson

MEDIA LIAISON

Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network