



## PACIFICE PAPERS

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**This Paper** describes a project, carried out in the second half of 2008, to devise local government policy directions for community gardening and facilitate the start-up of a community food garden. Between them, the consultants to the Kogarah Council project — Faith Thomas and Russ Grayson — have devised three local government policy direction documents for community gardening. Both have participated in community gardens.

Faith, with her background in Permaculture design and education, operates the Living Schools consultancy, providing sustainability education and youth services. Russ does media for the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network ([www.communitygarden.org.au](http://www.communitygarden.org.au)) and works in food security in Australia and with a consultancy operating in the South West Pacific. He is a member of the Sydney Food Fairness Alliance and is a speaker on food issues.

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### New uses for old land...

## A participatory approach to a community garden start-up

Projects can be simple or complex, urgent or relaxed, successful or unsuccessful, pleasurable or not so.

This publication describes a project that was simple and successful, not too urgent and definitely pleasurable. In describing the project, I digress to talk about project design and implementation in general and take side trips to look at techniques of community and stakeholder participation in projects.

### The project

In responding to the call for expressions of interest by Kogarah Council, we decided to take the approach recommended by the permaculture design principle of cooperating rather than competing. Consequently, Faith Thomas and I submitted an expression of interest together to plan and implement the project through Faith's consultancy, Living Schools.

The project's outputs were to consist of a community garden policy directions document for Council, the formation of a core group that would form the nucleus of an eventually larger team to garden the disused bowling green and supporting documents in the form of a gardener's charter and garden guide.

Faith and I shared a similarity of experience in community garden development. She had started and guided a community food garden in Dungog, on the NSW mid-north coast, before moving to Sydney where she engaged in water and environmental education for local government, and in work with gardening in schools and with youth.

I had experience in Permaculture education, community gardens and with the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network, a national organisation providing communications, educational and advisory services to community gardeners and local government.

It was only late the previous year that I had completed a policy directions document for Marrickville Council in Sydney's populous Inner West. Faith had completed a similar project for City of Sydney only a few months later. Those two projects marked the first policy directions documents to be produced for local government in Sydney and were a change for the better in the way that community food gardening is approached by both local government and citizens.

*Participants engage in a small group process known as World Cafe on the site of the proposed community garden at Carss Park.*

*Demographic change in the suburbs is leading to the decline in viability of bowling clubs and, as a result, their land is coming up for reuse. Three in the Greater Sydney Region have been, or are in the process of being made into community food gardens.*

*The Carss Park Community Garden will occupy the top and best drained of the disused bowling greens. The disused bowling club building is being turned over to community use, with Kogarah Council's childcare centre occupying the lower level.*

## The necessity of a structured approach

All too often, projects, ventures and adventures started by small organisations — notably the smaller, non-government organisations (NGOs) and, particularly, community-based and voluntary associations — start with great flourish only to later fade with nothing more than a wimper.

Sometimes, this is due to external factors beyond the capacity of the organisation to influence. Other times, and especially with voluntary associations, it's because the promised help and support either fails to materialise or dissipates with time.

We did not want to see this happen to the Carss Park Community Garden project, so we made a point of identifying what it was that potential gardeners wanted from the site and to include participants in decision making about the project. A range of participatory processes was used to engage those taking part.

As with any project, having a realistic and thorough project plan is always a good place to start.



## The project

Kogarah Municipal Council administers a sizeable chunk of Sydney's southern suburbs, and the site of the community garden was to be in Council's heartland, in Carss Park. Council's call for expressions of interest included a project brief that described what Council wanted, how they wanted it done and by what date.

Our project proposal addressed all of Council's needs and was accepted by Council. After being notified of the success of our tender, we made an appointment to meet with the Council officer responsible for preliminary discussions — the Waste Services manager.

That was the start of an amicable relationship with Council, a relationship marked by cooperation and Council enthusiasm for the project.

It is not uncommon for council staff in this role to take an interest in community gardening as they see the gardens as venues for green waste processing to turn it into compost.

*Faith Thomas leads a discussion on the first of the community participation days.*

*It was important to keep the participation events informal but to have a structure that ensured participation and the accomplishment of the day's objectives.*

*The consultant's provided lunch and refreshments for the day and Council was active in promoting both the community consultation and the later community participation days.*

## First meetings

First meetings are important to the success of projects. They define expectations and clarify things that may have been ambiguous in the tender document. First meetings provide the opportunity for consultant and client to get to know each other a little, so establishing the basis of trust, which is critical to the success of projects.

Such meetings are times to suggest changes to what has been proposed so that the elements of the project integrate and relate to each other better and so the project, as a whole, flows smoothly from one part into another. Those familiar with the Permaculture design methodology might recognise the principle of 'relative placement' in this. Usually applied in landscape design so that the elements in the design work together more effectively, like most Permaculture design principles it is applicable to other areas of activity.

At this meeting, we negotiated changes to Council's proposed order of implementation of project components. One of these was to complete the research and policy writing phase first, then to approach the community garden development phase. We figured that holding



the community consultation phase immediately prior to the community participation events on-site would generate a level of enthusiasm among the community garden's early adopters that might otherwise dissipate were those components held further apart in time.

Faith and I had, of course, met a couple times before that first meeting with Council — once about project design and developing and submitting the expression of interest and, after that, to prepare for our first meeting with Council (the Fair Trade coffee house on Glebe Point Road became our preferred meeting place during the project).

## PPM — Project Planning and Management

PPM is a term used by project managers to describe the planning and implementation of a project. Depending upon the scope of the project, it is done either formally or with less formality. Obviously, the larger and more complex the project, the greater the degree of formality.

What is important in PPM is sequencing the project parts or components so that the project builds on earlier components and flows as smoothly as possible. Some things have to be done before others. For example, in developing a community garden, path and garden bed construction and soil improvement should be completed before the laying of articulated irrigation or planting. This is known in PPM jargon as establishing the 'critical path' through the project.

We followed a structured but adaptable path through the community garden project, completing the research and policy directions phase first, then the community development phase to gather together a core group of local people interested in using the community garden.

## First things first

In his acclaimed book on time planning and management — *First Things First* — Stephen Covey advises identifying the most important things and prioritising them so that the less important do not get in the way of their accomplishment. He also advises that we keep 'the main things the main thing'.

This can be taken as a warning against mission creep — the taking-on of additional objectives during the project simply because they are a good idea. Mission creep leads to over-reaching the capacity of a team to accomplish what it was they originally set out to do.

This was something Faith and I were aware of, through our experience in project work, and it was something we kept in mind, given Council's needs and time limit.

A means of recognising what were first things — the most important — and putting first things first was to develop a project summary as a means of comprehending the project and the influences acting on it.

## Devising a project summary

After looking at the project brief, making an expression of interest, having that accepted and meeting with Council, we drew up a project summary as a way of envisioning the scope of the project and thinking through how we could approach it.

A project summary is just that — a statement outlining the major components. It:

- is an overview that serves as a reference to the project
- familiarises those outside the project with what is going on
- identifies what components will require more detailed planning in the form of action plans.

The value of drawing up a summary in the project planning phase, as a means of thinking



*Faith Thomas leads a discussion on site analysis.*

through the project, cannot be overemphasised. A project summary had been developed in the expression of interest, however I decided to put the information into the format more familiar.

We started by first identifying the overall purpose of the project — that is, to create the starting conditions for a community garden, to produce policy recommendations on community gardening in the local government area and to produce a gardeners' guide and agreement. The gardeners' agreement was to establish collegial and cooperative decision making processes and to govern gardener behaviour on-site.

Next, we developed a set of objectives that would move us towards the overall purpose. These were output-based according to the products stipulated by Council. We set a means — called 'indicators' — by which we could measure progress towards the objectives and confirm when they were completed. For

example, we might produce a gardeners' agreement and present this to Council as completed. However, if there had been no agreement on the document's content by Council and gardeners, it would not really be a completed objective. Thus, the indicator included acceptance by Council and gardeners.

Other components of the project summary included:

- assessing the assumptions underlying the project and our approach to it; action based on faulty assumptions can crash a project or make it impossible to even get it started; for example, it was an assumption of Council that there would be sufficient public interest to make a community garden viable — had this been untrue then there would be no garden because there would be no 'community' of gardeners; it is always important to assess assumptions and the first meeting with the client is a time to clarify them
- stakeholder analysis identifies those with an interest in the project's outcome; Council and gardener group are obvious core stakeholders, however people in the vicinity of the proposed garden may have an interest for reasons other than gardening, such as their continued access to the land, traffic etc; the adjacent childcare centre turned out to be a very interested stakeholder
- risk assessment identifies potential hazards on-site so that they can be remedied; there were no significant risks and those to do with the process of gardening were to be taken care of through training in garden safety and through discussing safe gardening in the garden guide
- identifying constraints and opportunities on-site were important to garden design; constraints include environmental (such as soils), human — the concerns of neighbours — as well as site conditions such as shade patterns throughout the year; identifying

opportunities provides the option in design to take advantage of them

- working out what equipment and materials would be required for successful community gardening enables a budget and acquisition timeline to be developed, sponsorship sought and grant applications written.

See page 19 for project summary.

## Project timeline

The finish time for the project was fixed by Council. Within that, we arranged the project components — research, consultation, the on-site days, production of the guide and gardener's charter — at what seemed the appropriate times over the three month period of the project.

Components were scheduled so that they flowed one into another. The community participation, for example, was contingent upon completing the community consultation phase as it was during that phase that we were to bring together the core group of gardeners.

Both the consultation and the following participation phase were scheduled late in the project timeline — after producing the policy directions — so that the core group maintained cohesion and there was a clear and rapid process of public activity leading to the final participatory event on site — the design activity.

## Budget

While our part of the project was funded by Council as per the tender process, the budget for developing the community garden was to come from Council resources. Council planned to start garden development rather than seek grant funding, which would have introduced delays in starting work.

By the end of our part in the project, Council had not decided whether they would design and construct garden infrastructure as a single work or develop the basic garden infrastructure and

then develop the rest of the garden as a series of modules according to gardener demand. Both approaches would work.

Was the modular approach to be chosen, initial works would best include:

- any extension to water access (there were two taps on-site, both in working condition); there were plans to connect the rainwater tank on the adjacent community centre to the garden
- construction of a pergola to shelter gardeners from sun and rain, with a water tank to store rainwater running off its roof for use in the garden; a pergola equipped with a table and seating is important infrastructure in community gardens
- durable paths
- garden beds
- lockable storage for tools.

A shared room in the community centre was to be made available to the gardeners, with storage for their books and records (a list of reference books for acquisition by the community garden was provided to Council).

The development of a budget for Council works was not included in our part of the project.

## The path of greatest difficulty

There are many models for starting community gardens, but the council-instigated one is perhaps hardest of all. Despite this, the model is encountered more and more frequently, at least in Sydney.

The difficulty — or potential difficulty, for it need not be difficult if there is already interest in community gardening in the area — comes with councils having the good idea of starting a community garden and having the funds and the land, but having no community to garden it.

Council-instigated gardens are a top-down approach that entails more work for council staff than the bottom-up, demand driven model in which a community group approaches council for assistance and does most of the work.

The experience of Young Earth Community Garden at Chester Hill, Hurstville Community Garden and, now, Carss Park Community Garden indicate that, despite potential difficulties, the model can be made to work. It certainly helps to have a motivated council behind the scheme.

## A project of parts

Some time prior to commissioning the project, Kogarah Council had received a consultant's report on the disused bowling club site that approved its use as a community garden. Thus, there had been some preliminary floating of the idea. Now, some years later, the purpose of our project was to bring the garden into existence.

Most projects are made up of parts and this one was no exception. The community garden project was designed as five distinct but connected phases:

- first phase — research and policy production
- second phase — community consultation
- third phase — community participation
- fourth phase — production of supporting documentation (gardener's guide and charter)
- fifth phase — getting the proposal through Council.

*Carrying out a soil test as part of the participatory site analysis and design process.*

*A participant records information as the other assess soil structure.*

## Project process

### Expression of interest

Upon Council calling for expressions of interest in the project, Faith Thomas and I decided to work through Faith's organisation, Living Schools.

The expression of interest supplied information on the phases that would make up the project as well as project personnel and experience, project scope, requirements, methodology, reporting and evaluation, work plan and schedule, quality assurance, fee structure and budget and an organisational profile of Living Schools.

### The important initial meeting

Upon acceptance of our expression of interest by Council and their commissioning of the project, a preliminary meeting was held for initial exploration of the project.

Such meetings are important. They provide the opportunity for consultant and client to get to know each other, to explore areas that remain ambiguous and to clarify the process. Importantly, they clarify understandings as to how the project will unfold.



## Phase one: research and policy production

This was the first and lengthiest phase during which the policy directions document was developed. The topics addressed reflected what Council stipulated in the project brief.

Council required information about trends in community gardening and other information that would context what they hoped to do. They wanted to know about the different community garden structures and how they were managed, about governance and how other councils related to community gardens. Having developed much of this information for the previous year's policy directions for community gardening project for Marrickville Council, I had a head start.

We decided to proceed with the research phase first, partly because we felt that this stage of the project was the proper place for its production and, partly, because Faith had a Pemaculture teaching engagement overseas. It was something I could start immediately.

Research is an intensive process, as anyone that has done any will acknowledge. Much time is spent flicking through books and online sources, tracking information through search engines and talking to people.

One of the challenges of online research is identifying information you can trust, that which is credible. That wasn't difficult as I was familiar with the topic and had clues as to where to look. I also made use of the interviews I carried out for the earlier Marrickville Council community gardens policy directions recommendations project. The information gleaned was still current and, when it was collected, had revealed new information about the motivations for and practice of community gardening.

One thing you soon learn about research of this type is to leave sufficient time to do it. Generally, things take longer than you might

initially think. If you use a dial up Internet connection for online research like I did, then things will take longer again — anyone planning to do this sort of work might do well to invest in broadband.

From our work in developing community gardens and advising local government on them, we knew that presenting precedents was an important thing to do. This is something that groups setting out to ask local government for access to public open space to start a community garden are always advised to do. Photographs and written descriptions of existing community gardens, that operate similarly to what they are planning, can reassure council staff that other local governments are already hosting such ventures and that they are safe territory for councils to venture into.

## Phase two: Community consultation

In the project brief, Council stipulated community consultation to gain the alignment of local people with the proposal to create the community garden.

Four consultation events at community centres and at Council were scheduled on evenings over the period of a week and were advertised by Council. That they would take responsibility for doing this had been negotiated during our first meeting. Closer to the dates for the consultations, there were no RSVPs for the final session, so it was cancelled.

The three consultative evening events were held in widely separated parts of the local government area (LGA). The locations were chosen so that they provided the opportunity to make contact with people in different parts of what is a large municipality.

The purpose of the consultation was to:

- familiarise people with community gardening
- harvest their ideas on what they would like in a community garden

- gather together a core group of would-be gardeners to participate in the later community participation events and to form the initial group of gardeners.

The consultants provided refreshments for the consultation and community participation events. Because Council wanted the project to be a 'green' process, organic food and brewed, free trade coffee was provided.

The consultants recruited and active and enthusiastic core community garden team.

### Community survey

A survey of community attitudes to the proposed community garden and what should be included in it formed part of the community consultation phase.

The consultants designed a survey form and supplied it to Council which letterboxed the surrounding streets and the medium density apartments along the Illawarra rail line where it runs through Kogarah municipality. Although the apartments were not close to the proposed community garden site, Council thought that residents might like to take advantage of the chance for outdoor recreation in the garden and to supply a little of their food.

This was sound thinking in as much as researchers have found that people who might have had a garden, but who have downsized by moving into apartments, can miss their gardens. This applies especially to aged or retiree residents.

An A3 size posted was designed for display in Council libraries, community centres and

*The group divided into site analysis and design teams of four or so to develop their site analysis maps and ideas for inclusion in design. Each group presented their findings and ideas to the whole group.*

*In the photo, a small group develops their ideas on where the elements of the design should be placed in the landscape.*

*Small group activities such as this proved a successful technique which gave some control over outcomes to participants and fostered group cohesion*



other locales. This informed people about the community garden and how to participate in the consultations, or how to follow-up after the consultation phase ended.

Council took responsibility for printing and distributing the posters, however by the time they would have been ready, the first two consultations had been missed.

An Adobe InDesign file of the survey and accompanying posters was left with Council's graphic designer so Council could adjust the documents for later use in the community garden development process, if needed.

### Internal consultation

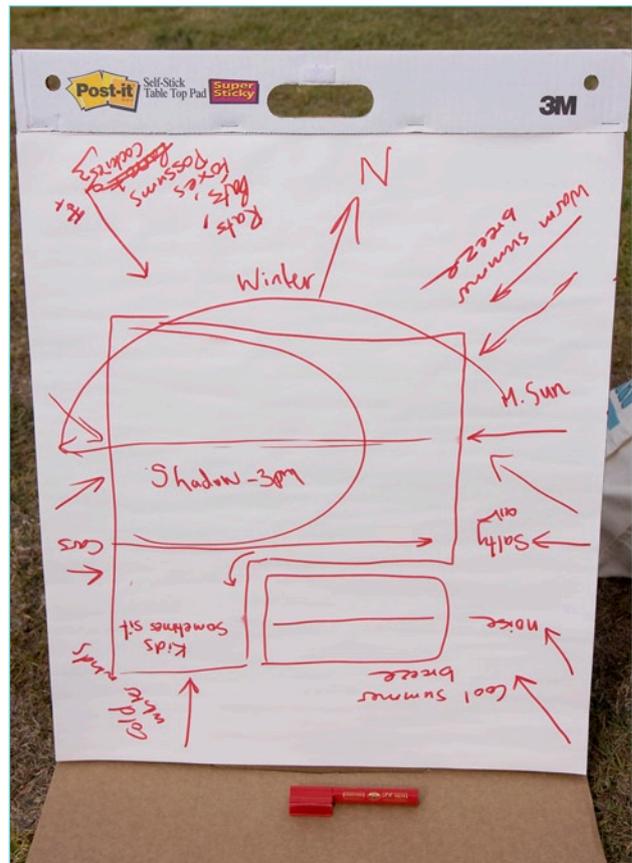
Council asked for an internal consultation — with Council staff, that is — as part of the consultation process.

Rather than speaking with interested staff individually, we thought it better that staff and consultants meet together as a group. That way, we might draw additional information from a shared discussion. Council's Waste Services Manager offered to organise staff.

I anticipated that staff from parks, community development, waste services, planning and environmental education would participate. A total of five, perhaps six people, perhaps. Imagine my surprise to stand in Council's meeting room with 26 people in front of me. They came from all of the above-mentioned departments plus the depot (to see what extra work they would have to do), law enforcement, assets, parks, communications, childcare and more.

To get proceedings off to a proper start, the general manager made an introductory speech before he went on to another engagement. This was strategic in that it signified that Council was taking the community garden idea seriously.

This was a constructive meeting that went beyond its allocated time due to the questions and conversation that developed.



The start of a site analysis map, showing north point, shading patterns and direction of winds.

### Consultation and participation — not the same thing

There is often confusion in distinguishing between consultation and participation.

Consultation starts with a given and asks community opinion on it. Properly done, consultation is a limited form of participation that allows for dissenting, even opposing viewpoints to be documented.

A real-world example was provided by a Sydney council planning to revamp its public plaza. Their community consultation exercise consisted of setting up a tent in the plaza in which three or four alternative designs were exhibited. People who wandered in were asked which they preferred and the features that appealed to them. This harvested information to go into the winning design.

In contrast, and first of all, a participatory approach would have asked whether people wanted the plaza redeveloped at all and, if they

did, what they would like to see included and retained. That is a different starting point.

The two processes can elicit different types of information and the choice between them demonstrates the importance of starting conditions when it comes to projects. Different starting conditions can produce different outcomes.

### Phase three: Community participation

This phase consisted of two days, each of five hours, on the site of the proposed community garden.

These were well attended by people recruited during the consultation phase and others joining later.

The events were designed to:

- produce an action plan and consider the organisational aspects of the community garden
- through a participatory site analysis and design process, identify site characteristics and needs/wants for the garden, and to pass these on to Council's landscape architect for inclusion in the garden design he was to draw up.

### Techniques to elicit ideas

A range of techniques were employed in the consultation and participatory phases of the project.

#### World Cafe

A participatory technique known as World Cafe was employed to enable the garden core group to come to their own decisions. Council staff — the Waste Services Manager, landscape designer and a child care worker from council's adjacent childcare centre — also participated but not in any controlling way.

World Cafe is one of a number of participatory processes that make use of small group discussions. A set of themes related to the topic is identified and the discussions take place around these, the findings being recorded in flip chart paper as mindmaps.

A short period is allowed for each topic. One person stays with each table to provide continuity to the following group when people move on. Individuals can move to tables in any order, eventually participating in the discussions around all of the themes at the separate small groups, the aim being to further develop what the previous group has done and to introduce ideas not yet recorded.

World Cafe worked well. It was a technique we had both separately made use of in other circumstances.

#### Small group deliberation

Other techniques of participation were also used, such as group discussion and group brainstorming to capture ideas.

Brainstorming is an information collection technique developed in the UK by Tony Buzan. It is based on the rapid suggestion of ideas and their recording on a radiating diagram. The entire group participates.

The idea is the rapid documentation of ideas. These are written up by the facilitator or a scribe. No discussion or judgement of the ideas takes place and the brainstorming process is carried out rapidly. Analysis takes place after sorting ideas according to criteria relevant to the purpose of the process.

Group discussions were used in both the consultation and participatory sessions. Small groups of four to five discussed topics and developed ideas that were then shared with the entire group and documented.

### The Workshop Method

A variation of the small group discussions was the Workshop Method. This is an idea identification and sorting process.

Ideas generated on particular topics by small groups are posted on a wall. The facilitator guides the participants in sorting the ideas according to commonality and they are re-posted under common headings.

We used this technique to find out what people participating in the different consultation and the on-site meetings wanted in a community garden. Common elements were made into labels for the site design process held on-site.

### Match the card

For the site design day, a card-matching game was used to introduce participants to elements of sustainable design.

The game was developed by Permaculture educator, Robyn Clayfield. It introduced participants to the interrelationship of the design elements that they wanted in the garden.

### Site analysis and design

Site analysis — identifying the influences that affected the site — used both full-group and a small group exercises. Participants were first introduced to the purpose of site analysis, after which they identified:

- the direction of cold, blustery and potentially damaging winter winds
- the direction from which the dry, low-humidity winds of summer come
- sun and shade patterns and estimating their extent throughout the year
- the pH (acidity/alkalinity), type, structure and texture of the soil
- topography — slope and drainage and potential areas where rainfall runoff might pool

- existing structures and vegetation, their condition and whether they should be retained or removed
- the presence of services such as power and communications wires, underground pipes and services and easements
- the presence of wildlife.

These things were recorded as A2 size size, annotated sketch maps.

As for existing vegetation, the bowling green supported only a low growth of grasses and plants like cat's ear. Participants decided that the vegetation around the side and streetfront edges of the green should be retained. This included a Pandorea vine twining along a fence, a Geraldton wax shrub and a Cootamundra wattle.

Following site analysis, small groups were provided with design features in the form of small labels. Based on what they learned during the card game, the groups discussed where the different elements should be placed. The corresponding label was stuck to an A2 size site sketch plan. Small groups presented their ideas to the larger group.

At the conclusion of the participatory site analysis and design process, the findings were handed to Council's landscape architect to be drawn into a plan for the community garden.

### Phase four: Production of supporting documents

This consisted of two items:

- a gardeners' guidebook detailing garden management
- a gardeners' charter covering conduct and agreements to be made for membership of the community garden team.

Council and consultants agreed that the documents were draft versions only. They might later have to be ratified by gardeners and Council and, if necessary, amended. Both



*A card matching game developed by Robyn Clayfield was used to develop learning about the garden desing process. The game took place prior to participants going on to develop their own design ideas by working in small groups.*

*The game is based on concepts of Permaculture design. It was used to develop a multifunctional and effective design for the site that incorporates as many of the participant's needs and wants as practical, and that was influenced by the objective conditions identified in the site analysis, such as shade patterns and soil conditions.*

*The card game proved successful and a more interesting altrnitive to delivering design information as a lecture.*

parties were happy with this and we viewed the document as simply setting starting conditions so that the gardeners could start gardening as soon as possible.

As for the manual, that developed by Faith Thomas for the City of Sydney was adopted.

## Phase five: Getting it through Council

This required producing a Powerpoint slideshow as a means of presenting to a Council meeting the recommendation that Council support the community garden and policy directions. The Powerpoint format was a requirement of the project brief.

The presentation went well and Council voted support for the garden unanimously.

That done, the project moved into the site design phase with Council's landscape architect.

Having completed the requirements in Council's project brief, it also brought our role in the project to an end. However, we let Council and the garden team know that we were happy to assist by providing advice and, if needed, informal training via our roles in the Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network.

### The future

Gardeners are understandably anxious to start gardening and are expected to liaise with Council's landscape designer and Waste Services Manager in the development of the site plan.

In making recommendations to Council, it was left open as to whether Council construct the entire garden at once or develop it in modules, according to demand.

*A participant explains her group's site plan.*



## Impressions

### Local government and community gardens

Sydney is perhaps unique in its different approaches to community garden development and management.

It includes gardens started and managed by community associations with only minimal and infrequent interaction with the councils that provide access to land, one community garden modelled on the UK allotment system in which gardeners have limited management and direction-setting, and a couple gardens facilitated by councils in which gardeners participate as council volunteers. All are potentially viable. The different models suit different people with their different interests, their interest in involvement in managing the garden and their ideas on the role of citizens and government, access to land and community development.

The Kogarah project was an example of a council-instigated community garden, a popular approach that has emerged with the increasing popularity of community gardening over these past few years. Prior to this, community gardens were community-initiated and were started by community groups that approached councils for access to land. Many still start this way.

With the council-instigated community garden essentially a top-down model, we attempted to implement the project in as bottom-up a way as possible and to instill this structure in the ongoing operation of the garden and in the gardener's future partnership with Council. With this, Council was happy and, in fact, was more or less what they requested. Their reason for wanting to retain a role in the management of the garden, in partnership with the gardener's group, was that, as a local government organisation, they retained

responsibility for the public land resource in the local government area.

Our aim was to encourage the gardener's group — although it is only at present a core group set up to get the garden started — to develop the social, planning, conflict resolution, negotiation and shared decision making skills that are necessary to community-managed projects (in partnership with Council in this case). We believe that the development of social capital, which includes all of the above skills, to be a key element in the sustainability of our cities.

## The value of social capital

All too often, environmental advocates focus purely on issues of natural systems and neglect the social and community-building needs that are necessary in any move towards sustainability.

Research, however, indicates that it is individual behaviour change and a sense of place and community that underlies sustainable neighbourhoods and cities. Thus, our focus on a bottom-up approach to the development of social capital and the community garden as a local social venue around which a sense of place and, eventually, a sense of community might develop.

Social capital can be defined as the range of beneficial and cooperative relationships between individuals and groups that further the development of society. Social capital is a necessary component of a viable and robust civil society, which can be regarded as being based on the relationship between individuals and between non-government organisations formed and sustained by groups of people acting voluntarily, without seeking personal profit, to provide benefits for themselves or for others.

Wikipedia describes civil society as “...space for free association, where people could meet

and form groups to pursue their enthusiasm, express their values and assist others”. It is a “vibrant space, full of argument and disputation about matters of greatest import to its citizens”.

For us, social capital is an essential property for a resilient society that will have to make the transition to conditions of climate change and, eventually, increasing oil prices and oil scarcity as the peaking of global oil extraction pushes global demand for oil up, just as availability goes into decline.

We chose to make use of both consultative and participatory processes to further the development of gardener self-management, in partnership with Council, and the development of social capital. We knew from experience that community gardens capable of a high degree of self-management make less work for councils as they increase the interpersonal and organisational skills of gardeners.

## Participation and local democracy

Council and consultants knew that the process adopted would be longer and more involved than Council simply going out and building a garden, hoping to acquire a community somewhere along the way.

For the consultants, the decision to approach the project as they did was based on considerations of meeting Council's needs, laying the basis for the building of social capital and enabling citizens to exert a level of control over land in the city. Community gardens, after all, are probably the only public place that would qualify as citizen-designed open space.

Participatory processes are inherently democratic. That is, they create intellectual space in which those individuals that want to can have a say. In the sense that ideas are talked through in a facilitated, non-competitive

environment, the processes we made use of were compatible with the practice of deliberative democracy. This included input from people who were interested in the idea of a local community garden but who did not want to participate in garden membership.

### A cooperative council

The full cooperation of Kogarah Council was exemplary, particularly that of Fiona Stock, the Waste Services Manager and her staff as well as Council's communications department and its landscape architect.

Council wanted this garden to happen and did their best to make it possible. It was an example of how well a project can proceed when all parties are in concordance and when participatory processes are employed to generate a sense of community ownership.



*...it is individual behaviour change and a sense of place and community that underlies sustainable neighbourhoods and cities. Thus, our focus on a bottom-up approach to the development of social capital and the community garden...*



*Site analysis activity — Kerry, the woman in purple, assisted the participation days as part of her field work for her accredited Permaculture training course.*



*Documenting site conditions.*



*Kogarah Council staff participated in on-site events on the basis of being stakeholders.*

*Second from left is a staffer from the Narari childcare centre adjacent to the site of the proposed garden; centre is Council's landscape architect, Anthony Parker; right is a staffer from the Waster Services section.*

*Narari childcare were interested in opportunities for the children to make use of the community garden.*

# Project summary

PROJECT COMPONENT	PROJECT ELEMENT	
<p><b>Purpose</b></p> <p>Note: The purpose of a project is the big picture aim it sets out to contribute to.</p>	<p>The purpose of the project was to start a community garden at Carss Park and make recommendations to Kogarah Council for a policy on community gardening.</p>	
<p><b>Objectives</b></p> <p>Note: Objectives are specific things that will be done to achieve the project purpose or goals. They are usually stated in a way that they can be monitored and measured, so as to gauge progress.</p> <p>Objectives may also have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• indicators — the means by which they are monitored and by which accomplishment is recognised</li> <li>• timings — specific periods of time in which they are to be accomplished; sometimes, the completion of an objective is dependent upon the completion of a previous objective, creating a dependency</li> <li>• significant objectives may mark the completion of a significant part of the project and may be identified as 'milestones'.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Produce policy recommendations on community gardening for Kogarah Council.</li> <li>2. Carry out a survey as part of the community consultation process.</li> <li>3. Form a core group of people who would participate in developing ideas for the community garden and who would become the first gardeners.</li> <li>4. Produce a gardeners' guidebook detailing garden management.</li> <li>5. Produce a gardeners' charter covering conduct and agreements for the use of the garden.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Indicator</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Recommendations reviewed by Waste Services manager then presented to Council meeting with recommendation for adoption.</li> <li>2. Survey document produced, distributed and returned.</li> <li>3. Implementation of community consultation process in three locations in local government area and subsequent core group participation in community participation phase.</li> <li>4. Guidebook reviewed and accepted by Council Waste Services manager.</li> <li>5. Charter reviewed and accepted by Council's Waste Services manager. Gardeners to approve the document with the later option to review and amend in negotiation with Waste Services manager.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Outputs</b></p> <p>Note: Outputs are what will be produced and delivered to the commissioner the project.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Policy directions on community gardening in the local government area.</li> <li>2. Gardener's guidebook to the Carss Park Community Garden.</li> <li>3. Gardener's charter.</li> <li>4. Garden design ideas for Councils's landscape architect.</li> </ol>	

<p><b>Stakeholders</b></p> <p>Note: These are people with a direct and indirect interest in the project. Identifying the nature of stakeholders' interest may be of use in project management and garden design.</p>	<p><b>Stakeholder</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kogarah Council.</li> <li>2. People living near the proposed community garden.</li> <li>3. Other Kogarah citizens.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Interest</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Project outcome and paracticability.</li> <li>2. Participation in garden; local environment and amenity; impact of community garden on street.</li> <li>3. Participaion in garden, Council activities and expenditure.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Timeline</b></p> <p>Note: The project schedule is usually drawn up in graphical form as a Gantt Chart. Among other things, the chart identifies dependency activities — those that must follow an earier activity. A PERT chart may be developed to show the sequence and dependent activities.</p>	<p>Presented separately.</p>	
<p><b>Assumtions</b></p> <p>Note: These include what is taken to be the 'givens' of the project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sufficient interest exits to start and maintain a community garden in Carss Park.</li> <li>• Council motivation and support to start a community garden will continue.</li> <li>• The site will prove suitable for community gardening.</li> <li>• There will be no public opposition such that would prevent the development of the proposed community garden.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Constraints</b></p> <p>Note: Constraints are potential limiting factors on project development. They are identified so as project managers remain aware of them and can monitor their potential influence as the project goes into implementation. Constraints may indicate weakensses that could become threats the project.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The presence of acid sulphate soils below 1.5m.</li> <li>2. The non-existence of a team of people to start and operate the proposed community garden.</li> <li>3. Lack of knowledge about the level of community support for a community garden.</li> <li>4. Lack of knowledge about potential community opposition to the construction and operation of a community garden.</li> </ol>	
<p><b>Risks</b></p>	<p>There existed no objective risks that would prevent gardening. Safe site work practices, to be introduced to particiants at a later time, are expected to obviate any risk.</p>	

<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>Note: These are listed so as advantage can be taken of them, if necessary.</p> <p>Opportunities may be potential strengths within the project.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council motivation to start a community garden.</li> <li>• Earlier consultant's soil test and report stipulating the site as suitable for a community garden.</li> <li>• The existence of the disused bowling green and access to the associated building.</li> <li>• The existence of taps on site and of a water tank on the adjacent building.</li> <li>• A clear and apparently well-drained site with good solar access. Site characteristics will be defined in detail during the proposed participatory site analysis and planning activity.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Materials</b></p> <p><b>Consumables</b></p> <p>Note: Consumables are materials that will be used up during the project.</p> <p>The cost of consumable and non-consumables is itemised in the project budget.</p> <p><b>Non-consumables &amp; equipment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• flip chart paper for community consultation, participation events</li> <li>• marker pens for community consultation, participation events</li> <li>• food for community consultation, participation events</li> <li>• promotion of events and project</li> <li>• Council staff time</li> <li>• project managers' time.</li> <li>• Powerpoint presentation on community gardens for community consultation events</li> <li>• projector and stand for community consultation, participation events (Council to provide)</li> <li>• flip chart easel and paper for community consultation, participation events</li> <li>• venues for community consultation, participation events (Council to supply)</li> <li>• seating, table for participatory events on-site (Council to supply)</li> <li>• BBQ and cook for community participation events (Council to supply)</li> <li>• access to Council child care centre for community consultation, participation events</li> <li>• trowels and pH kits for soil assessment for community participation event</li> <li>• transport</li> <li>• participatory tools — card matching game etc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Budget</b></p>	<p>Presented separately.</p>