

Bob Mollette

3rd Ward Councilman

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Honorable Council Members
Jim Kalb, Mayor
Michael Jones, Solicitor
Trent Williams, Auditor
728 Second Street
Portsmouth, Ohio 45662

Re: Exploring Community Gardens

I am seeking thoughts and coordination concerning the ability of the City to provide our citizens with an area for a community garden space. The unique and commonsense initiative was expressed to me from a thoughtful citizen, Ms. Rita Haider. A successful community garden could encourage neighborhood spirit and self-reliance during challenging economic times.

I have enclosed a couple of publications from the American Community Gardening Association (www.communitygarden.org) suggesting steps to start a community garden. Also this information would not be complete without the enlightening and helpful conversation with a well-known community garden enthusiast Mr. Bill Sowkulech of West Portsmouth, Ohio. He has volunteered his time for the last twenty-five (25) years to coordinate and encourage community gardening on the designated county property near Earl Thomas Conley Park. Mr. Sowkulech stated the area consists of approximate two (2) acres which supplies roughly twenty-six (26) garden spots with the possibly of more depending on size of the garden spot needed. Some gardeners reserve big or small spots depending on the desired plants (beans, corn, potatoes, or just onions). One of the few rules is just proper weeding to avoid conflict between garden spots. He stated during the heat of the day many excellent conversations occur under the shade tree.

I appreciate Rita Haider's and Bill Sowkulech's thoughtful ideas and public service. Thank You!!

Please consider this information for ideas and application within the City. Contact me if you should have any comments or questions.

Respectfully,



Bob Mollette, 3rd Ward Advocate and Representative on City Council

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cc: Ms. Rita Haider, 3355 Indian Drive, Portsmouth, Ohio 45662
Mr. Bill Sowkulech, 43 Brouse Street, West Portsmouth, Ohio 45663
Jo Ann Aeh, Clerk (Record)



10 STEPS TO STARTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN*

The following steps are adapted from the American Community Garden Association's guidelines for launching a successful community garden in your neighborhood.

1. ORGANIZE A MEETING OF INTERESTED PEOPLE

Determine whether a garden is really needed and wanted, what kind it should be (vegetable, flower, both, organic?), whom it will involve and who benefits. Invite neighbors, tenants, community organizations, gardening and horticultural societies, building superintendents (if it is at an apartment building)—in other words, anyone who is likely to be interested.

2. FORM A PLANNING COMMITTEE

This group can be comprised of people who feel committed to the creation of the garden and have the time to devote to it, at least at this initial stage. Choose well-organized persons as garden coordinators. Form committees to tackle specific tasks: funding and partnerships, youth activities, construction and communication.

3. IDENTIFY ALL YOUR RESOURCES

Do a community asset assessment. What skills and resources already exist in the community that can aid in the garden's creation? Contact local municipal planners about possible sites, as well as horticultural societies and other local sources of information and assistance. Look within your community for people with experience in landscaping and gardening. In Toronto contact the Toronto Community Garden Network.

4. APPROACH A SPONSOR

Some gardens "self-support" through membership dues, but for many, a sponsor is essential for donations of tools, seeds or money. Churches, schools, private businesses or parks and recreation departments are all possible supporters. One garden raised money by selling "square inches" at \$5 each to hundreds of sponsors.

5. CHOOSE A SITE

Consider the amount of daily sunshine (vegetables need at least six hours a day), availability of water, and soil testing for possible pollutants. Find out who owns the land. Can the gardeners get a lease agreement for at least three years? Will public liability insurance be necessary?

6. PREPARE AND DEVELOP THE SITE

In most cases, the land will need considerable preparation for planting. Organize volunteer work crews to clean it, gather materials and decide on the design and plot arrangement.

7. ORGANIZE THE GARDEN

Members must decide how many plots are available and how they will be assigned. Allow space for storing tools, making compost and don't forget the pathways between plots! Plant flowers or shrubs around the garden's edges to promote good will with non-gardening neighbors, passersby and municipal authorities.

8. PLAN FOR CHILDREN

Consider creating a special garden just for kids—including them is essential. Children are not as interested in the size of the harvest but rather in the process of gardening. A separate area set aside for them allows them to explore the garden at their own speed.

9. DETERMINE RULES AND PUT THEM IN WRITING

The gardeners themselves devise the best ground rules. We are more willing to comply with rules that we have had a hand in creating. Ground rules help gardeners to know what is expected of them. Think of it as a code of behavior. Some examples of issues that are best dealt with by agreed upon rules are: dues, how will the money be used? . How are plots assigned? Will gardeners share tools, meet regularly, handle basic maintenance?

10. HELP MEMBERS KEEP IN TOUCH WITH EACH OTHER

Good communication ensures a strong community garden with active participation by all. Some ways to do this are: form a telephone tree, create an email list; install a rainproof bulletin board in the garden; have regular celebrations. Community gardens are all about creating and strengthening communities.

* the most common advice sought from ACGA, also visit <http://www.communitygarden.org/starting.php>



Ten Tips on Local Advocacy (especially to get gardens preserved)

1. **Develop a plan (or don't wait for crisis).** If your garden is not protected, understand exactly who owns the land. Know exactly what you are asking for and who you are asking. Is there a public process or is it "who knows whom"? Your plan should include the other tips listed below. Meanwhile keep the garden looking great!
2. **Develop allies.** *Community gardens*, low income housing organizations, churches, schools, community development organizations all serve the same constituencies. Introduce potential allies, *including government officials and business leaders*, to the garden. Determine areas of commonality and find ways to have gardeners help your allies. Be sure to ask your allies to take specific actions to help your cause.
3. **Be prepared for opposition.** Acknowledge, in advance, that there will be objections to your efforts. Know both *who is* likely to be in opposition and *what objections* they will raise. Read opposition material, study the newspapers, watch or listen to talk shows, and check websites. Determine if there are any points of commonality. Learn, if possible, if you have contacts with those to whom the opposition listens.
4. **Become known.** Invite decision-makers and the media to your garden. Host activities for neighbors. Share your produce. Do other community service – a children's program; horticulture therapy, conduct neighborhood clean-ups and plant tree-pits. Make presentations at nearby neighborhood and tenant association meetings.
5. **Use the media.** Develop a compelling message which includes what you are asking for and a convincing reason why you should get it. Determine spokespersons and have them practice giving your message. Make a list of the human interest stories of your garden. Write up the stories (with photos!) for neighborhood weeklies. Invite newspaper and TV garden reporters to the garden. Don't forget public access cable TV.
6. **Meetings, meetings, meetings.** Be prepared to attend public meetings of the city council, planning department, parks commission, city planning and zoning hearings, and health department. Whenever possible sign up to speak at these meetings and present your message. Host meetings of your own to inform and motivate gardeners.
7. **Resolutions, plans, and ordinances.** Take the offense. Get friendly local legislators to sponsor and champion resolutions and ordinances supporting community gardening. Be alert for opportunities to have community gardening promoted and sanctioned within neighborhood and citywide planning and re-zoning efforts.
8. **Celebrate successes.** Preservation efforts can take many years. However, there can always be something to celebrate (alliances with new organizations, a successful harvest, a resolution sponsored). To keep up spirits, demonstrate progress, become known, use the media, and involve allies – have press conference, parties, and congratulatory award events.
9. **Be persistent.** The opposition is hoping that you will just *go* away. Don't let them wear you down. This is why having parties (tip #8) is so important. It is really important that gardeners really do go to ALL the meetings!
10. **Be flexible.** Be open to changing your campaign to reflect the needs of allies or what you realize is more realistic long-term success. For example, you may lose a garden, but gain a commitment to the building of a permanently protected and larger garden across the street.

