

# Fisherman's Wharf Herb Garden Proposal



James Bay Neighbourhood Association  
September, 2020  
Revised, November, 2020



**James Bay Neighbourhood Association**

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## **Proposal and vision**

The James Bay Neighbourhood Association (JBNA) is proposing that the existing herb garden in the southeast corner of Fisherman's Wharf Park, currently maintained by the City, be designated as a community garden, and a license of occupation be granted to JBNA.

There is no intention to alter the current purpose, size, or hardscaping of the herb garden. We propose that the City continue to be responsible for the care of the *Cornus kousa* trees and the paths within the garden, as well as the snowberry hedge which separates the herb garden within the park, while responsibility for day-to-day nurturing and gentle enhancement of all other planting within the herb garden would shift from City staff to the JBNA gardening volunteers.

Our goal is to create a herb garden which better performs its original functions - to provide fresh herbs and berries to neighbours and to provide an attractive entrance to Fisherman's Wharf Park - and which also provides additional social and educational benefits to the community around it.

## **Ability to maintain the herb garden**

The James Bay Neighbourhood Association is a registered not-for-profit society in good standing. Membership is open to all James Bay residents and the JBNA is governed by an elected Board of Directors.

The JBNA contracts the services of a garden advocate, who, under the direction of the JBNA board, will coordinate the team of volunteers to care for the garden.

Over the last five years, the JBNA has developed a strong group of gardening volunteers and demonstrated its ability to start and sustain community gardening projects, including two plantings of neighbourhood food trees in parks, a very public garden at the corner of Michigan and Menzies, twice-a-year neighbourhood plant swaps, a neighbourhood seed box/exchange, and a new allotment garden on private land at Huntingdon Manor Hotel. The JBNA was also approved some years ago to hold the License of Occupation for the Montreal Street Community Garden.

At present, three long-standing volunteers, all with horticultural knowledge and skills, have committed to helping with the initial planning and ongoing maintenance of the herb garden, while three more have offered to join the group "when it gets hands-on and you need weeds pulled".

We feel that we have a core group of volunteers who can ensure that we can give this garden the attention it needs. We anticipate following the model used in our other community garden of a once-a-week work party during active gardening season and, during the winter months, a weekly one-person visit to pick up litter and check for damage.

## **Community benefits**

We foresee a number of benefits from converting the herb garden into a community garden.

First, it offers an additional opportunity for residents to garden. James Bay is a high-density neighbourhood; many residents live in multiplexes with no access to land. Turning the herb garden into a community garden provides another venue where residents can enjoy the proven health benefits and pleasures of gardening.

We also believe that, with the increased labour available when operating as a community garden, we can increase the production of fresh herbs and berries, which is of particular value to the community at a time of economic uncertainty for many. These are the types of foods which, in thin times, may be regarded as expensive 'frills' and crossed off the grocery list.

The herb garden has great potential as an educational venue: it is self-contained, fairly quiet, and there is room off the main central path to gather small groups. When the pandemic situation allows, we intend to conduct ID and picking tours for the community, and also anticipate using it as a small outdoor classroom for other gardening topics.

We have had a few preliminary conversations with other community organizations, such as nearby daycares and Imagine Studio Cafe, a social enterprise which serves at-risk youth, about how they could use the herb garden in their programs, and we will ramp up these conversations once we know that we will, in fact, be assuming operation of the garden.

The garden, with its many strongly-scented and tactile plants, is also particularly well-suited to serve partially-sighted gardeners, and this is something we would like to explore in the future.



## Proposed enhancements

The herb garden was opened in 2012, as part of the redesign of Fisherman's Wharf Park.

The garden, located at a park entry point, provides a transition zone between busy urban streets and the more natural rain garden and native plantings of the park interior. It was also intended to provide a supply of fresh, pickable herbs for neighbouring residents, many of whom live in apartments and have limited or no access to growing space.

We propose to continue operating the garden to accomplish these two goals, and to adhere to our usual guidelines for planting in public spaces, such as avoiding use of invasive or potentially dangerous plants.

However, we would also like, as time and money are available, to make some gentle enhancements to allow the garden to better accomplish its initial purposes. Our aims for enhancement include:

- Keep the herb garden well-weeded and otherwise maintained to a high standard
- Increase the year-round visual interest of the garden for both neighbours and visitors, thus contributing to the overall appeal of Fisherman's Wharf Park
- Increase the amount of herbs and other food produced in this space by using inter- and under-planting
- Increase the variety of herbs available for picking, including some from outside western European culinary staples
- Increase the space's ability to attract and support pollinators and other beneficial wildlife, supporting biodiversity in that corner of the park
- Make the garden more usable by persons with differing abilities, e.g. by elevating some plantings of smaller herbs for those who find it difficult to pick at ground level
- Use our established community connections, signage, tours, and workshops to increase community knowledge about the plants in the garden and encourage picking and use
- Share any excess with a food bank or other community project addressing food insecurity

**Proposed Enhancement 1:** Elevate some of the smaller herbs to improve accessibility



Currently, most of the smaller culinary herbs in the garden, such as thyme, are planted at ground level, where it is difficult for people with bad backs or who use wheelchairs or mobility scooters to reach them. We would like to elevate some of each low-growing herb in clusters of bottomless tubes of different height near the paths, so they can be more easily harvested by all.

We have chosen tubes, rather more conventional raised wooden planters, as they echo design elements found elsewhere in the park: the pilings of the wharf itself and the wooden posts in the children’s play area. Tubes also provide flexibility in layout, as they can easily be added, removed, or moved, and can be positioned to avoid interference with the existing irrigation system.

We also believe that these vertical elements can serve another purpose: encouraging dog owners to keep leashed dogs on the path and out of the main herb beds. [Note: Fisherman’s Wharf Park is currently piloting off-leash hours and many dog-walkers enter the park via the main central path through the herb garden. From our observations, dogs are generally leashed, but, with the beds at path level and with no clear border between beds and path, dogs do regularly walk across the herb beds.]



**Proposed enhancement 2:** Increase density and variety of herbal planting

We would like to increase the variety of herbs offered. Currently, the small herb selection consists mainly of perennials which are commonly used in western European cooking. We would like to add annual/biennial herbs, such as dill, coriander, and chervil, plus a selection of herbs used in other culinary traditions that can be grown in our climate, such as the Asian herbs perilla and garlic chives. Also, we believe that, at present, there is only one culinary herb native to our area in the garden, and that is another area to research and possibly expand on.

If there is room, we would also consider adding common herbal tea plants and a selection of flowering plants which produce petals, leaves, and seeds used as flavourings.

In order to increase the variety of plants within a limited growing space, we propose increasing the density of the planting. There are a few empty spots, where perhaps a planting has died out, and some areas where plants are spaced at very wide intervals, with a lot of bare soil between. We would also look at underplanting some of the shrubs with shade-tolerant herbs, such as sweet cicely, and interplanting between them.



**Proposed enhancement 3:** Increase the pollinator support offered by the herb garden

Many of the herbs and berries in the garden offer some support to native pollinators. We would like to ensure that there is a good supply of nectar and pollen throughout the year, add herbs that provide host plants for native butterflies, add 'bee bowls' for drinking water, and enhance nesting habitat for native bees where possible.

**Proposed enhancement 4:** Replace plant labels and add other signage

At one point, the plants in the herb garden were identified, but only one label remains at present. We would like to reinstall a labelling system, so people using the garden can feel confident about plant ID.

At present, the only sign at the herb garden entrance is headed “Notice” and says to keep dogs out, which is not terribly welcoming. There is no name or indication that the public is allowed, and even encouraged, to harvest from this space. We would like to add a welcoming sign that identifies the herb garden and indicates that harvesting is allowed.



**Proposed enhancement 5:** Create on-site composting capacity



Adding an on-site compost bin would give us a way of managing our green waste, allow nutrients to be returned to the soil, cut down on the need to buy soil amendments, and allow us to keep the area free of fallen fruit which can attract wasps and rodents. It would also cut down on transport and therefore carbon emissions.

We propose installing an all-metal [Speedibin](#) to reduce the risk of both rats and vandalism, and adding a keyed lock to prevent passersby from adding anything unsavoury.

**Installation and maintenance**

Installation tasks arising from this proposal are minimal.

There are two for the City to do before or shortly after handover:

- Install a water tap (proposed location on map)
- Restore the gravel paths. Note: From our observations, it seems that the location and dimensions of the paths may have shifted considerably, with graveled areas expanding into the beds, so that, for example, one sprinkler head is now in a path.

And three for the JBNA gardeners to do:

- Install the composter (proposed location on map)
- Install raised planting containers (proposed location on map)
- Install sign and plant labels

Ongoing maintenance will be done by weekly volunteer work parties. One of our first tasks will be to research the existing shrubs, to be able to make a care calendar for them. While the details will vary, depending on individual plants, our rough maintenance schedule will be:

- Late winter: planning, pruning, weeding, tending the hardscape

- Early spring: seed sowing, clean up, weeding
- Spring: more sowing & planting, weeding, mulching
- Summer: supplementary watering where needed, deadheading where appropriate, weeding, monitoring for pests
- Fall: planting, seed saving, mulching, weeding, seed sowing, minor cut back and tidying where appropriate
- Winter: monitor for litter and damage weekly

Note: normal garden waste will be composted on site. Invasive weeds and seed heads will be removed from the site by the garden coordinator and properly disposed.

### City contribution

We propose that the City continue to perform some of the maintenance functions which it already carries out in this space:

- Maintain the existing gravel paths. The main path through the herb garden is one of the main entrances into the park.
- Maintain the *Cornus kousa* trees within the herb garden.
- Maintain the snowberry hedge which divides the herb garden from the park.
- Maintain the existing irrigation system.

Water supply: While there is an existing irrigation system, we would also like to have a water tap added so that the gardeners can access water for washing or watering in new plantings.

We would also like to receive the usual contributions to community garden operation, such as leaf mulch delivery.





## Need for a joint management plan

Because this is a somewhat unusual community garden proposal, in that it suggests taking over part of the decision-making about a space originally created by City of Victoria Parks, we feel that it is essential, in order to prevent misunderstanding, to have a clearly described division of responsibility and clear communication channels.

Issues that need to be addressed include:

Agreement on what level of decision can be made and carried out by the JBNA garden volunteers under the license of occupation and what level of change needs to be discussed with or approved by Parks.

Setting up a clear channel of communication by which Parks can notify the JBNA gardening volunteers of work that they intend to do in the herb garden or its near vicinity.

We would also like to have a clear understanding of how Parks intends to manage the *Cornus kousa* trees, as this will affect the amount of shade and therefore planting decisions.



## Proposed schedule

### Winter/early spring 2021

- Learn more about the garden growing conditions: light patterns, soils
- Research existing plants and their care; develop a 'care calendar' for the site
- Weed garden thoroughly
- Prune shrubs as needed
- Mulch under shrubs, trees and hedges where appropriate
- Select areas to focus on for 2021 and plan new plantings
- Apply for funding for composter, raised planters, and signage

### Spring-summer 2021

- Continue basic maintenance tasks
- Sow and plant new plantings for 2021
- If funding received, design signs
- If funding received, buy and install composter and raised planters

### Fall-winter 2021

- Continue basic maintenance
- Select area(s) to focus on for 2022 and plan new planting
- Produce and install signs

### 2022 on:

- Continue with regular gardening tasks, repairs and maintenance as required
- Revise/upgrade planting in one area each year, responding to neighbourhood suggestions and use patterns, as part of ongoing maintenance cycle

**Proposed budget**

Start-up costs	
Composter, inc addition of lock	\$ 500
Tube planters, inc soil to fill	2500
Signage and plant labels	1000
Plants & soil amendments for initial plantings	1000
	<hr/>
	\$5000
Ongoing operating costs	
Repairs and replacements, e.g of individual plant labels	\$200
Plants and seeds	\$100
Soil & amendments	\$100
Volunteer recognition	\$100
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	\$500/yr

**Proposed sources of revenue**

For capital (start-up) costs:  
We plan to apply for a Community Garden Start-up grant. If we fail to receive that, we will apply for a My Great Neighbourhood Grant in the placemaking category, other grants, and, as a last resort, ask for community sponsors for specific elements.

For ongoing operating costs:  
We plan to apply for a Microgrant for community garden operating costs.

Community contributions:  
A modest estimate of the amount of volunteer labour provided by community members is 4 people for two hours per week, through a 10-month active gardening season. This equals about 320 hours of volunteer labour per year, for a cash value of \$6400.

There is already an active network of people in James Bay who participate in community gardening or support it by supplying seeds and plants from their private gardens. We expect most of the seeds and plants we need will be obtained by community donation.

## **Garden design**

The original garden proposal from 2011 shows a much more formal layout. The garden, including the plantings, was bilaterally symmetrical, the paths were sharply defined, and the junction of the main path through the garden with the outermost cross-path took the form of a circle edged with shrubs (presumably intended to be kept pruned as a formal low hedge). The path layout is also quite different.

We propose to keep all existing trees and shrubs and the existing path layout. We would, however, like to gradually restore the symmetry of the path system, re-establish a clear distinction between 'path' and 'bed', and enhance the health and visual impact of some of the more formal planting, such as the lavender edging around the sidewalk perimeter of the garden. Our goal is to create an ordered framework for the garden, which respects its original design, but gives us scope to develop more dense, productive, and pollinator-friendly planting with the beds.

## **Structures**

**Beds:** The existing beds will be retained. Some plants of the shorter and most popular herbs, such as thyme, will be raised to provide greater accessibility as indicated on the map.

**Accessibility features:** All paths in the garden are 'Parks standard' gravel, with short cement transition zones off the City sidewalks. Judging by the width of the cement portion of the paths, the central axis - the most used path - was originally 7 feet wide, and the paths which cross it were 5 feet wide. This meets current accessibility standards.

We have consulted with four community members: one who uses a mobility scooter, two with hip issues using walkers and/or poles and canes, and one with back issues. They generally find this space quite usable, but identified the issue of finding it difficult to harvest the lower-growing herbs. To help overcome this, we propose raising some of the lowest-growing and most popular herbs by growing them in tube planters positioned near the path (see map). Tubes will be sunk with  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the total length underground, to create stability, and be placed in four clusters, with three tubes in each cluster. Above-ground heights for each cluster: one tube at 30", one tube at 24", one at 18". If we discover problems, the tubes are moveable and, to some extent, height adjustable. Additional stabilization can be provided, if needed, by adding three pieces of rebar, driven to a greater depth, inside the edge of each tube.

**Fencing:** none exists and none is required

Location of composter and water: one of the biggest challenges has been figuring out how to incorporate the items required for active community gardening into an existing design. We propose setting up a 'work zone' or 'gardener's zone' at the west end of the outermost cross path. Our rationale for choosing this area is that:

- It is closest to the water box, which is just outside the snowberry hedge near the Erie Street sidewalk (see map)
- It is along one of the least-used and more overgrown paths, where any gardening activity such as accessing the composter, will have the least impact on public visiting the garden. Activity here will not intrude on the sidewalks or central path, and there is a parallel path a few metres away.
- All planting in this area is repeated throughout the garden, so a gardener or two standing in this path will not block public access to a particular food.
- In summer, it is visually screened from many other parts of the garden.
- It is the shadiest corner of the garden which, while not optimum for making compost, is also not optimum for growing most herbs.

See map for detailed locations, and note that this area will only be a 'gardener's zone' during weekly garden work parties and that public access along the path is likely to be obstructed only when there is serious work going on at the compost bin, i.e. turning or removing compost.

Signage: We would like to install one sign, 36" long by 24" high, at the entrance to the garden (see map) with the name of the garden, an invitation to pick what you need, and indicating that the area is a community garden managed by the JBNA.

## Plants

We propose retaining all existing trees and shrubs:

### Trees

- 10 *Cornus kousa* - trunks all approx 10 cm diameter
- 1 *Ficus carica*, 'Desert King'? - trunk approx 12 cm diameter

### Shrubs

- 2 *Corylus cornuta*, managed as coppiced shrubs
- 4 *Arbutus unedo*
- 2 *Lonicera caerulea*
- 4 *Ribes rubrum*
- 4 *Vaccinium* ? (blueberry)
- 8 *Aronia arbutifolia* 'Brilliantissima'
- Approx 20 *Vaccinium ovatum*

### Sub-shrubs

The lavender border and most of the rosemaries will be retained. Some of these sub-shrubs are not in good health, have been overgrown by other plants, have been stepped on and suffered physical damage, or have sprawled badly. We plan to begin a program of taking cuttings and growing new plants from the existing stock, so that we can replace damaged plants and gradually rejuvenate the subshrub plantings.

### Other food plants

Other existing food plants, such as artichokes and strawberries, will be retained.

### Herbs

Existing perennial herbs will be retained.

Our plan is to identify zones suitable for growing various types of herbs which like particular conditions. We anticipate that the planting in each zone will evolve over time, as we learn more about site conditions, as shade from trees increases, as we see which herbs are used most, and as we get suggestions from the public about further herbs to grow.

Below is a list of potential herbs to grow, by zone.

For sun, dry and thin soil (probably the centre of the garden)

- Various thymes\*
- Oregano\*
- Sage
- Tarragon
- Winter Savory
- Borage
- Fenugreek
- Hyssop
- Salad burnet

For sun, richer, moister soil (probably the area near St. Lawrence, behind the strawberries)

- Anise-hyssop
- Monarda
- Chives\*
- Garlic chives\*
- Fennel\*
- Nodding Onion\*
- Perilla (Shisho)
- Nasturtiums
- Calendula

For semi-shade

Chervil  
Coriander  
Parsley\*  
Dill  
Lemon balm  
Lovage  
Mint(s)\*

For shade

Angelica  
Mitsuba  
Sweet cicely

\* currently in garden

## Materials

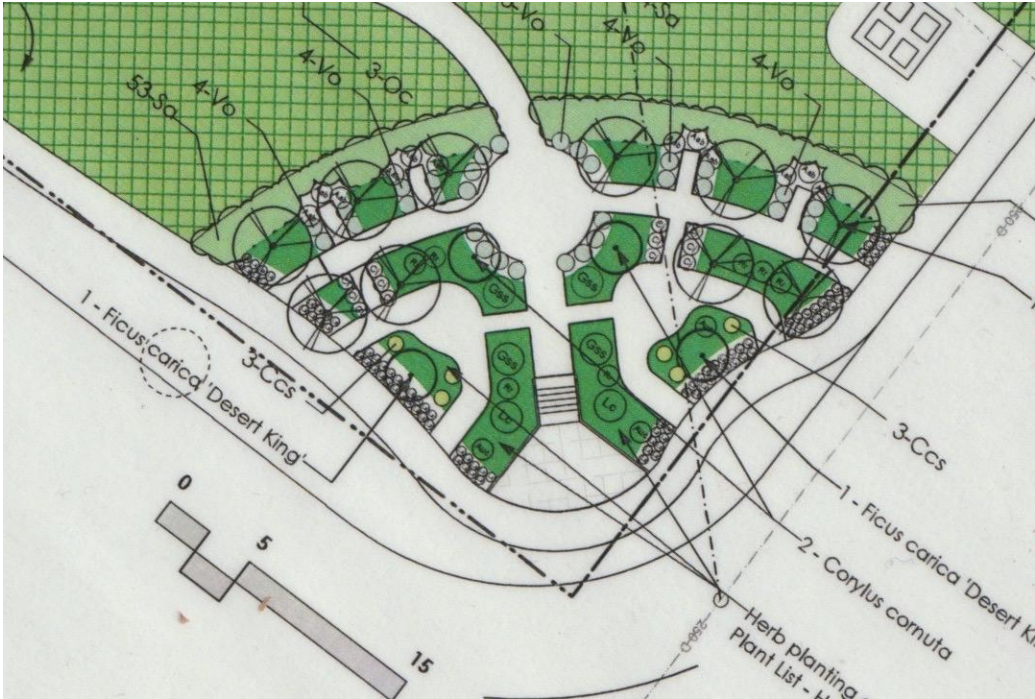
Composter: We have chosen a [Deluxe Speedibin Composter](#). It is made in BC by a BC company, is metal, rodent resistant, and can be fitted with a lock if necessary to prevent passers-by adding garbage. The dark green finish allows it to blend in to the plantings. We would place the corners on bricks or blocks to limit interaction with tree roots.

Tubes: 12 metal tubes, 8" diameter, cut to the following lengths: 4 @45", 4 @36", 4 @27". We are still researching various types of metal, availability, and prices, but are looking for an iron-based pipe which will develop a rusty or dark patina.

Sign: One sign, placed on the left of the main entrance. Vertical, 36" wide by 24" high in a black metal frame, to echo the general proportions and appearance of the main park signs. Design of the sign itself will not conform to City standards, as we feel it is important to indicate visually that this area is under community rather than direct City management.

Plant labels: Based on our experiences gardening in other public spots, it seems like there are only two strategies for smaller items: make them indestructible and as solidly attached as humanly possible or make them easily replaceable. We're proposing to go for replaceable, and label the individual herbs and berry bushes with painted rocks, which will be cheap, cheerful, and may even give us a good project to do with a school group or residents with an artistic rather than gardening bent. It will also make it easy for us to change labels as plantings change with the seasons or the evolution of the garden.

**Herb garden as proposed in 2011**

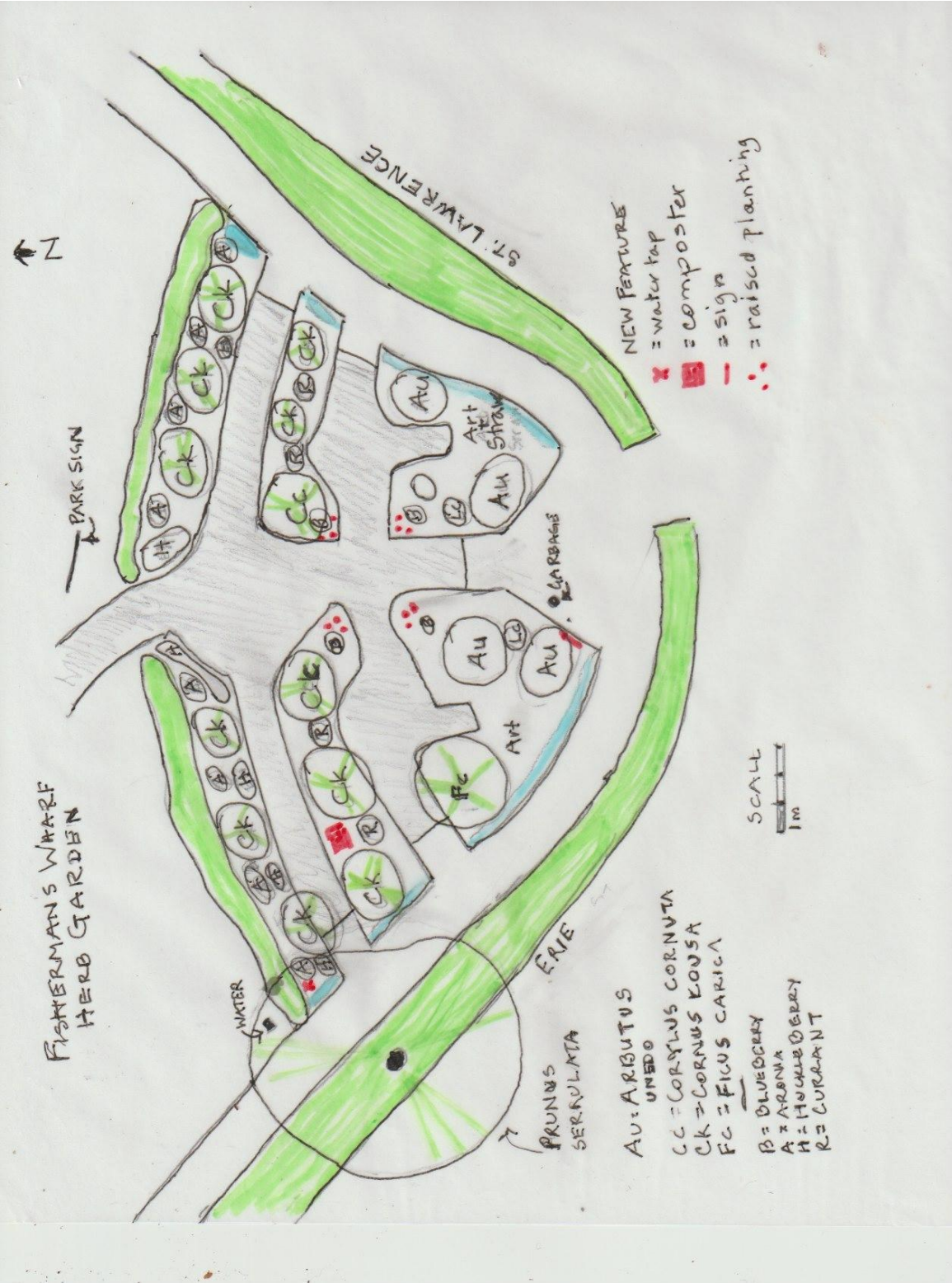


**Aerial view of herb garden today**





Plan and proposed location of new features



## Fisherman's Wharf Herb Garden Proposal - Appendix 'A'

This appendix contains supplemental information after review by and discussion, as of December 22, 2020.

### 1. Irrigation system

Parks will continue to maintain the existing irrigation system and install a water tap for use by the gardeners. The tap will be turned on and off with a water key. The gardeners will water by hand any plants not reached by the irrigation system.

### 2. Paths

Parks will inspect the paths and develop a plan to renovate as needed. Any new problems noticed by the gardeners should be reported to [parks@victoria.ca](mailto:parks@victoria.ca) which will then generate a CFS (calls for service).

### 3. Signage

The JBNA will be responsible for producing, installing, and maintaining the main sign at the entrance to the herb garden. The design, materials, and installation method will be reviewed with Parks before the sign is produced.

### 4. Damage reduction for hard elements

One of the major anticipated risks for the hard elements (composter, tubes, sign) is tagging and graffiti. The JBNA would appreciate advice from Parks on preferred materials for the sign and the advisability (or otherwise) of using graffiti-resistant coating on items such as the metal composter.

The planting tubes will have  $\frac{1}{3}$  of their length buried (like a fencepost) for stability and, where necessary, three lengths of rebar, longer than the tubes, will be placed at 120-degree intervals around the inner edge of the tube and driven into the ground until they are flush with or slightly below the top of the tube to provide extra stability. The planting tubes and anchoring will be mocked up and tested off-site before any tubes are installed in the garden.

### 5. *Cornus kousa* trees

Parks will continue to maintain the existing *Cornus kousa* trees on their usual 14- to 16-year maintenance cycle.

If the JBNA gardeners notice any damage to or issues with the *Cornus kousa* trees, the JBNA community garden coordinator will contact Parks through [parks@victoria.ca](mailto:parks@victoria.ca) which will then generate a CFS (calls for service).

The JBNA will not engage in pruning the *Cornus kousa* unless authorized by Parks.