



Lewis Park Commons Garden Proposal



James Bay Neighbourhood Association
October, 2022; revised January 2023

Part 1: Project information

Proposal and vision for the garden

The James Bay Neighbourhood Association (JBNA) proposes that the existing food growing area on the north side of Lewis Park, and a portion of the adjacent area, be designated as a commons garden, with a license of occupation granted to the JBNA.

During the last redesign of Lewis Park, about fifteen years ago, neighbourhood consultation led to the creation of a bed along the north edge of the park which was designated for communal food growing. The City planted it the first year, but since then, no one has been formally responsible for tending the area. In consequence, it has been gardened some years by guerrilla gardeners, some years by no one at all, and some years by neighbours who have stepped in to prevent the space from becoming overrun with blackberry and bindweed. Designation would allow for consistent management and ensure that the area's intended use as a food-growing commons is fully realized.

We envisage a garden in three parts:

- The largest part will be a food-growing garden, with an emphasis on perennial food plants to provide continuity and ease of maintenance. This space will also include 'snackable' annual food plants, such as snow peas and cherry tomatoes, for those visiting the park, and some high- and long-yield food plants, such as kale and zucchini, for general neighbourhood use.
- A herb bed for picking by neighbours.
- A flower patch that serves both as a cutting garden and a pollinator-support area.

Proposed garden activities consist of two types:

- tending the garden, which we envision being done principally by people who live in the surrounding area but lack access to land
- picking from the garden, which we envision as being done by families using the play area, people passing through the park, and by nearby residents who lack gardens of their own.

There is also the potential to use this garden and the adjoining park space (with appropriate permit) as a venue for gardening classes or workshops, as it is comparatively quiet.

Responsibility for operation

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 ensure that the garden is well-maintained.

Over the last few years, the JBNA has developed a strong group of gardening volunteers and demonstrated its ability to develop and manage community gardening projects, including operation of the Herb Garden in Fisherman's Wharf Park, 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 also holds the License of Occupation for the Montreal Street Allotment Garden

We anticipate following the model used in our other commons gardens: a once-a-week work party when weather allows and, when it doesn't, a weekly one-person walk-through to pick up litter and check for damage.

At present, the garden is being maintained on an ad-hoc basis by two neighbours, one of whom, having a garden of her own, would like to step back once more volunteers are recruited, while the other would like to continue. For the 2023 growing season, the Garden Advocate will need to recruit a larger volunteer group, which we anticipate coming partly from the existing group of JBNA garden volunteers, but mainly from those living in the many multiplexes within a few blocks of this garden.



Community benefits

We foresee a number of benefits from officially designating this garden as a commons 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 this space 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 food considerably, which is of particular value to the community at a time of economic uncertainty for many. By focusing on herbs, leafy greens, and fruit, we can provide a supplemental source of food items which may be regarded as “too expensive” and crossed off the grocery list.

The location, adjoining a small play area which is used by families with young children, provides an opportunity to introduce children to new foods, for children to see first-hand how food grows and learn how to harvest respectfully, and for healthy snacking while playing.

Any surplus produce will be harvested by volunteers and donated to the James Bay Community Project kitchen and food bank or other neighbourhood not-for-profits which can use it.

The garden will also enhance biodiversity and provide a more beautiful and interesting green space for all residents to enjoy.



Installation and maintenance tasks

This is a small and straightforward project. All tasks, except for installation of a water tap, will be carried out by JBNA garden volunteers.

Installation:

- Install water tap
- Mulch existing bed with City compost and plant
- Create herb area and plant
- Create cutting/pollinator garden area and plant
- Expand and plant food bed area

Ongoing maintenance:

Note: tasks and timing will vary from year to year, based on weather and what has been planted.

- Late winter: planning, pruning, weeding, tending the hardscape and edges
- Early spring: seed sowing, clean up, weeding
- Spring: more sowing, planting of seedlings and young plants, weeding, mulching
- Summer: supplementary watering where needed, deadheading where appropriate, weeding, monitoring for pests
- Fall: planting, seed saving, mulching, weeding, seed sowing, cutting back and tidying where appropriate
- Winter: monitor for litter and damage weekly

Note: normal garden waste will be composted on site, in the two existing composters. Invasive weeds and seed heads will be removed from the site by the garden coordinator and properly disposed of. Bins will be checked weekly and any inappropriate 'donations' from the public (food scraps, garbage, animal waste) removed.



Budget

Installation expenditures required

Initial soil amendments	\$ 100
Initial plants	\$ 200
Stepping stones	<u>\$ 100</u>
Total	\$ 400

The JBNA gardening program will cover the cost of installation.

Ongoing expenditures required annually

Soil amendments	\$ 50
Plants & seeds	<u>\$ 50</u>
Total	\$100/year

Operating expenses will be covered by the JBNA gardening program revenues.

Anticipated or received donations

Leaf mulch, compost, and/or wood chips	City
Composters (2)*	JB New Horizons
Four planters*	JB New Horizons
Transfer hose & nozzle*	JBNA
Plants	City food seedlings; neighbourhood donations; propagation by volunteers
Seeds	Neighbourhood donations
Labour (estimated 120 hrs/yr)	Individual volunteers

*already in hand

What the City will be asked to provide:

- Continued maintenance of existing park sprinkler system within the garden area
- Continued maintenance of existing tree within the garden area
- Continued mowing of grass areas within the designated garden space until beds are widened
- Installation of a keyed water box accessible to garden volunteers, similar to the one at Fisherman's Wharf herb garden
- Delivery of mulch, compost, and wood chips as requested under the existing Community Garden program

Timeline

This timeline is based on the assumption that a license of occupation is granted by spring 2023, in time to access a spring mulch delivery.

Spring 2023:

- Install water tap
- Mulch existing bed & plant for 2023
- Sheet mulch the new herb and cutting/pollinator areas and make an initial planting

Summer 2023:

- Tend plantings

Fall 2023:

- Add further perennial plants to the food, herb, and cutting/pollinator gardens
- Sheet mulch expanded food bed area and sow cover crop

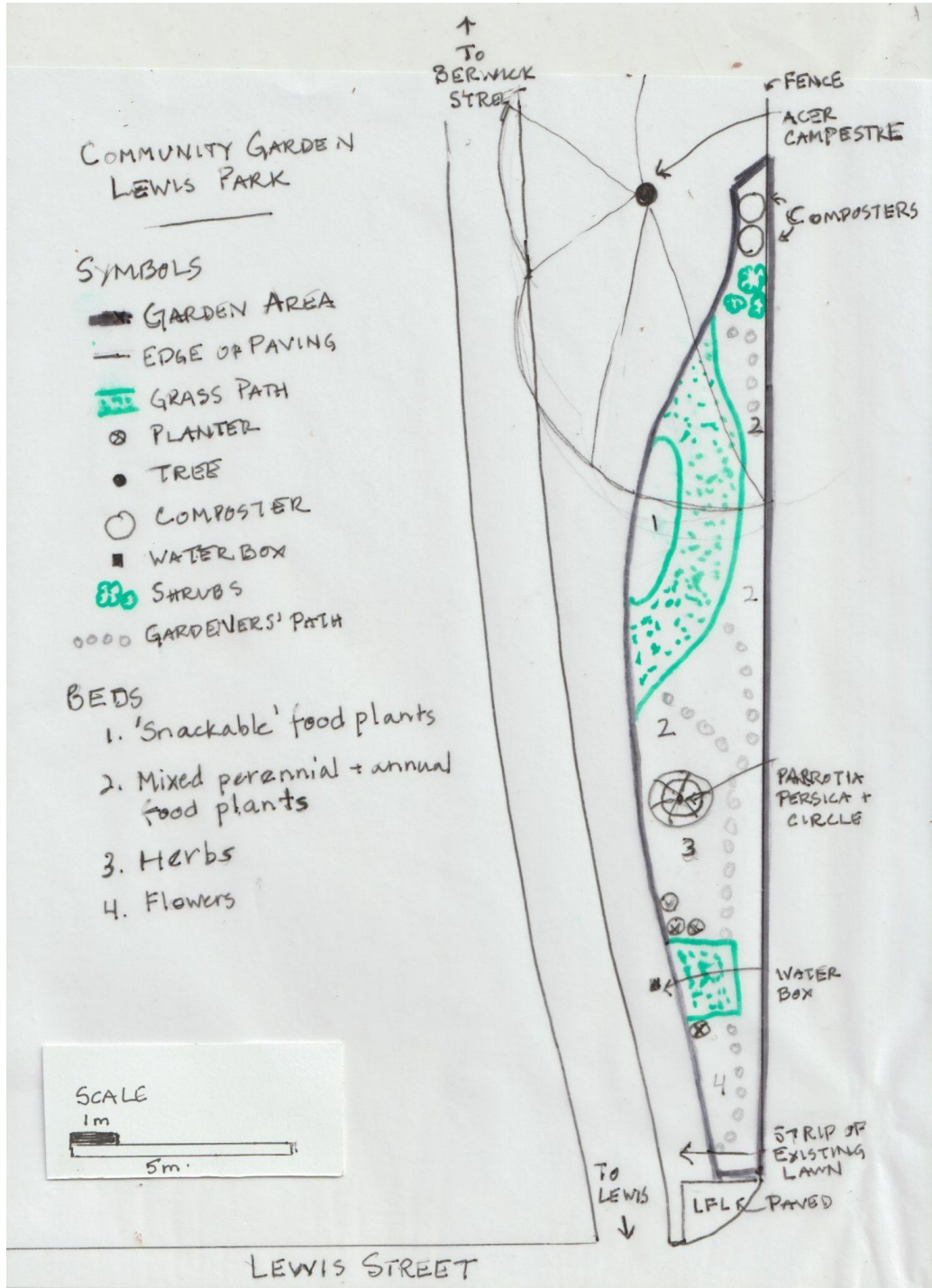
Spring 2024:

- Plant expanded bed area



Part 2: Garden Design

Site Map



Notes on design features and materials:

Shape and location of beds:

The garden will continue to consist of one long, in-ground bed along the fence bordering the north side of the park, and an island bed.

The proposed expanded bed begins immediately adjacent to the cement pad that supports the Little Free Library at the east end of the fence and runs for 22.5 m, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the length of the park.. The south edge of the garden area runs parallel to the curved path through the park for about half the bed's length, reaching a maximum width of 3 m, and then makes a gentle arc away from the path to avoid the root ball and shady canopy of a large maple tree.

An accessibility path through the widest part of the garden creates an oval island bed of 3.5 x 3 metres.

The front edge of the garden has been kept a minimum of 1.3 m from the path to ensure that it remains easy for groups of people using the path to pass each other. The path is also frequently used by dog-walkers, so we would like to maintain a buffer zone between the food beds and the path.

Universal accessibility features:

For our previous herb garden project, we consulted with mobility-impaired persons about possible impediments to using a pickable food garden. The two main items mentioned were path access and the difficulty of harvesting very low-growing plants, such as thyme.

We will include a 1.5 m path that winds through the wider part of the garden and a 1.5 m 'pull in' between the flower and herb sections in order to provide access to most crops for those using mobility devices. Most of our 'snackables', such as runner beans, snow peas, and tomatoes, offer food at reachable height for someone using a mobility scooter; we have made a deliberate decision to concentrate on taller plants. We have also been given four cylindrical planters; we will use these to raise the few low-growing plants, such as thyme or strawberries.

Fencing:

There is no additional fencing. This is a very small park and it seems important to retain as much sense of openness and unity within the space as possible. So far, there has been little deer foraging in the immediate area.

Pathways:

There is one 1.5 m grass pathway which winds through the wider parts of the bed to provide access and a 1.5 m 'pull-in' to provide better access to the flower and herb beds. The grass in these areas will be maintained by JNBA volunteers as part of the garden and may, at some point, be replaced by bee turf, chips, or gravel if degree of traffic makes grass maintenance difficult.

Structures and garden ‘furnishings’:

We propose to retain the two existing composters in their present location.

There are no other structures proposed. The park already contains a nearby bench and a picnic table, so adequate seating is near at hand. Hand tools will be brought to the site as needed.

Water access:

We propose that the existing water box be fitted with a keyed tap for use by the gardeners. This area is irrigated, so we need water only for supplementary and spot watering, and for cleaning tools (and gardeners) after a work session. We suggest something similar to the box installed for us at the Fisherman’s Wharf Herb Garden, which has sufficient room in it to house a 6’ hose and a watering can.

Access points and gates:

The bed is freely accessible for picking along its entire length.

Interior access is gained via the “garden path” which runs the length of the wider part of the bed and the ‘pull in’ between the flower and herb sections. There will also be ‘gardeners’ paths’ of stepping stones, primarily intended to provide volunteers a designated route to use when tending the beds. (There is currently a serious bindweed infestation on the other side of the fence, which means gardeners will need regular access along the fence line.)

There are no gates.

Signage:

There is no signage proposed. The park itself is not signed and additional signage for the garden seems inappropriate in such a small space so close to residences.



Plants:

There is one tree located within the garden area, a recently planted *Parrotia persica* (trunk diameter = 7.5 cm). This tree is a memorial to a recently deceased former resident of the block; flowers and other tokens are often left at it and easy access from the park path will need to be maintained for this purpose, as well as for City Parks staff to conduct routine tree care. We understand that this tree requires an expanded 1.5 m radius tree circle with no planting, and needs to be mulched according to City standards as specified.

A large and venerable *Acer campestre* (trunk diameter = approx. 50 cm) stands near the west end of the garden area, and, being a maple, will have an extensive shallow root system. We have curved the proposed garden area to keep as clear as possible of the root zone and are using the heavily shaded area to the north of the maple only for composters and native understory berry bushes.

There is another large tree within 10m of the proposed garden space, a white birch (*Betula papyrifera*), located across the park path about 6 m from the edge of the proposed garden area. Together, the birch and maple shade the entire west half of the park, and the birch cast some light shade into the middle section of the garden late in the day.

We propose planting one evergreen huckleberry and two salal shrubs at the west end of the bed, to provide a visual screen for the composters, food, and support for native pollinators and other wildlife.

Other plants will be chosen following our usual guidelines for public plantings, of nothing that is potentially harmful to humans, pets, or the wider environment. In each section - food, herbs, and flowers - we intend to create a strong backbone of perennial plants, and complement it with a range of annual and biennial plants that will vary from year to year, to provide interest for both park users and volunteers. Plants will be kept back 30 cm from the grass edge to prevent mower damage..

Transportation and parking

Park users and garden volunteers arrive almost entirely by foot, bicycle, scooter, etc. Creating this community garden should not require any additional parking.

On the rare occasion that the garden volunteers would need to deliver something by car, we can park in a supportive neighbour's driveway or at the Dallas Road parking.

Part 3: Community Engagement Plan

This community garden proposal is somewhat atypical, as we are not proposing a new garden development, but bringing a long-standing neighbourhood feature into line with current City policies by having it formally designated as a commons garden. For this reason, after discussion with City staff, we have decided that a minimal engagement process will suffice.

Stakeholders:

- Nearby residents of Lewis Street and the houses on Luxton St adjoining the park
- Persons with mobility issues
- Future garden volunteers

Strategies:

- Letter and open house for nearby residents. We will drop a letter at all houses in the immediate vicinity with an outline of the proposal & plan, and invite written comment and/or attendance at a drop-in session in the garden.
- Focus group for persons with mobility issues. We have a number of James Bay garden volunteers with a range of mobility issues, including one who uses a scooter. They advised us on the Fisherman's Wharf Herb Garden proposal and we will consult them again about this space.
- Future garden volunteers will not be consulted at this stage, but once the project is approved, we will make an effort to publicize the opportunity to volunteer in the multiplexes surrounding the area, including ones that offer lower-cost housing. Volunteers shape the project on an ongoing basis, including choosing the annual food and other plants to be included each year.

What will be reviewed in the nearby residents' engagement process:

- A one page description of what will be grown, the minimal physical change to the area, i.e. widening the bed, and what impact our proposed method of tending the garden will have on neighbours, i.e. a once-a-week work party in the garden during the growing season.
- A site plan

Questions that will be posed:

- Are you a resident of James Bay [yes/no]
- Do you support this community garden proposal? [yes/no]
 - If no, what are your concerns about the proposed changes to the garden?
 - If yes, are there any improvements you would like to suggest?
- Would you like to be involved with tending the garden?

What we heard:

Engagement was conducted according to the strategies outlined above.

We circulated a plan and description of the proposed activities to residents of Lewis Street and to the two houses on Luxton Street closest to the park, and held an open house at the garden site on Sunday, November 27. We engaged directly with five residents at the park drop-in and two more emailed their comments, for a total of seven.

Summary of park data

1. Are you a resident of James Bay?
Yes 5, No 0
2. After reviewing the proposed plan, are you in favour of designating this space as a Community Garden?
Yes 5, No 0
3. Would you like to volunteer to help tend the Community Garden?
Yes 2, No 3

E-mail comments (both from residents of Lewis Street)

“Looks good to me. Thanks for all your and Katherine’s work to finally get this moving .”

“Thanks for looking after the garden space I will have to think about any suggestions. However, at first glance the changes look very good.”

We also conducted a small focus group with five James Bay garden volunteers who either have long-term mobility disabilities or have had short-term ones in the past, to get their comments about accessibility.

Feedback from consult

1. The square shaped grassed access might work better as a scoop, so people don’t have to back out
2. Make sure that the planters are sufficiently tall that they can be reached by someone in a mobility scooter or wheelchair

Changes made as a result of engagement

1. When we build the garden, we will test various shapes for the east end ‘pullout’ to see what works best for someone on a scooter
2. Raise planters if necessary