

THE SOMERVILLE COMMUNITY GARDENS PROGRAM: POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

PRODUCED BY: SOMERVILLE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

The **Somerville Community Gardens Program** offers Somerville residents the opportunity to grow food, flowers, and plants in plots of safe soil in specially designated areas on public land. Residents can apply for community garden plots at one of the over 10 parks and open spaces around the city. The **Somerville Conservation Commission (ConCom)**, with the City of Somerville's Urban Forestry and Landscape Planner, oversees the program by helping establish new gardens, hiring a citywide garden coordinator, establishing policies for the gardens, and administering the Community Garden Fund that can accept donations for assistance with gardens and plantings in the City.

The policies and procedures for administering and taking part in this program are as follows. For any questions on the garden program or procedures, please do not hesitate to reach out to the contacts below.

Contacts

Malik Drayton, Urban Forestry & Landscape Planner and Conservation Agent
mdrayton@somervillema.gov
(617) 625-6600 x2514

Tara Mitchell, Somerville Citywide Garden Coordinator
somerville.gardens@gmail.com

Somerville-Garden-Coordinators Google Group

In addition to contacting the Conservation Agent or Citywide Garden Coordinator directly, the Somerville-Garden-Coordinators Google Group is the primary means by which all parties can communicate with one another. All new garden coordinators are added to the google group and given access to the shared google drive which contains all pertinent forms as well as the Community Garden Waitlists spreadsheet which has information on all garden plots and waitlists.

General information including a map of community garden locations, forms and a copy of this manual can be found on the Somerville Community Garden Program website:

<https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/programs/community-garden-program>

Roles & Responsibilities

Conservation Commission & Conservation Agent

- Review plans for creation or renovation of community gardens
- Hear seasonal updates on the program and vote on changes to improve it
- Hire and manage Citywide Garden Coordinator
- Manage the City's Community Garden Fund
- Conservation Agent to collect annual water fees from Garden Coordinators
- Upon request, Conservation Agent to schedule work with the Somerville Department of Public Works (DPW), including mulch and stone dust delivery, turning water on and off, and other maintenance work as needed

Citywide Garden Coordinator (Citywide Coordinator)

- Maintain the application, waitlist, and renewal processes with assistance from the Conservation Agent
- Support Garden Coordinators as appropriate, for example by assisting with the infraction process, performing spot-checks for maintenance at gardens, and assisting with communications with city staff as necessary
- Attend Spring and Fall cleanup events at gardens, when possible
- Send out online season summary form to garden coordinators and report to ConCom regarding feedback

Garden Coordinators (at least 2 per garden)

- Before the beginning of the season, determine which of the previous garden plot-holders will be returning to the garden and how many plots will be available for new gardeners. Contact people on waitlist to identify the new garden plot-holders for the season.
- Regularly update the Community Garden Waitlist google spreadsheet
- Communicate regularly with gardeners and build cohesion among gardeners
 - o Assign common area tasks such as bringing out garden waste, watering for vacationing plot-holders, and maintaining common areas
- Plan annual Spring and Fall garden clean-ups
 - o Notify gardeners of date and time of clean-up events (in the event that gardeners provide advanced notice of not being able to attend a clean-up event, provide notice of a general clean-up week)
- Check garden plots for infractions regularly and issue infraction notices, if necessary
- Communicate regularly with Citywide Coordinator during the growing season (i.e., May – November)
 - o Alert Citywide Coordinator when plots are available
 - o Report problems, potential infractions, or concerns to the Citywide Coordinator
- Fill out online Season Summary form to Citywide Coordinator at the end of the season

- Collect annual plot-holder fees from each gardener at the beginning of the season; send check to City in the amount of \$5/plot for the annual water fee; keep track of finances through the Garden Finance Tracking Sheet
 - o The check to the City for the Annual Water Fee should be made out to “City of Somerville” and sent to:
 - City of Somerville
 - Somerville Conservation Commission, Attn: Malik Drayton
 - 93 Highland Avenue
 - Somerville, MA. 02143
- Communicate with Conservation Agent to schedule work with the DPW, including mulch and stone dust delivery, turning water on and off, and other maintenance work (as necessary). Report back to Citywide Coordinator and Conservation Agent on more extensive required maintenance in the garden.
- Attend annual meeting with Conservation Commission and Citywide Coordinator

City of Somerville DPW

- Turn water on for the gardening season (ideally by mid-April), and turn water off before the winter
- Deliver bulk materials such as mulch and stone dust
- Clear collected garden waste and maintain abutting areas such as creeping vines and trees

Timeline

January	<input type="checkbox"/> Citywide Coordinator sends reminder to submit renewal forms and waitlist confirmations (due date April 1)
February	<input type="checkbox"/> ConCom hosts Garden Coordinators at ConCom meeting to discuss Community Garden Program
March	<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation Agent sends out summary of ConCom meeting to Garden Coordinators
April	<input type="checkbox"/> Gardener renewal forms and waitlist confirmations due to Garden Coordinators April 1 st <input type="checkbox"/> Citywide Coordinator sends communication to Garden Coordinators about planning spring cleanup events <input type="checkbox"/> Garden Coordinators prepare to lead a Spring cleanup day in mid-April to mid-May <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation Agent sends reminder to Garden Coordinators about submitting water fee check and mulch and stone dust requests <input type="checkbox"/> Garden Coordinators send mulch and stone dust requests to Conservation Agent <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation Agent communicates with DPW about turning on water by mid-April and delivering mulch and stone dust <input type="checkbox"/> Gardeners prepare their plots and begin gardening cool weather crops

May	<input type="checkbox"/> Garden coordinators notify citywide coordinator of any changes to plot-holders and provide updated contact info on all gardeners <input type="checkbox"/> Citywide coordinator updates the community gardens waitlist and gardener information spreadsheet <input type="checkbox"/> Garden Coordinators send water fee check (\$5/plot) to Conservation Agent (due June 1 st) <input type="checkbox"/> Gardeners must begin gardening
June – Oct.	<input type="checkbox"/> Garden Coordinators lead events and issue infractions as necessary <input type="checkbox"/> Garden Coordinators check in monthly with Citywide Coordinator <input type="checkbox"/> Citywide Coordinator sends season-end reminder about fall cleanup <input type="checkbox"/> Citywide Coordinator updates ConCom on the status of program <input type="checkbox"/> Garden Coordinators plan and lead fall cleanup event
November	<input type="checkbox"/> Garden Coordinators submit financial tracking information to Citywide Coordinator <input type="checkbox"/> Citywide Coordinator sends Garden Coordinator season summary survey <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation Agent finds out when DPW will turn off water and communicates details to Garden Coordinators
December	<input type="checkbox"/> Citywide Coordinator evaluates season summary survey data and meets with ConCom to discuss results and propose changes/updates

Policies

Application

Community garden plots are open to all Somerville residents. Applications are available online via Google Form (which can be automatically translated with Google’s language services) or as a pdf, both available on the Community Garden Program webpage, and printed versions are available at the Office of Strategic Planning and Community Development at City Hall. Printed applications should be made available at relevant community organization events such as Groundwork Somerville, Somerville Community Corporation, The Welcome Project, Union Square Main Streets, East Somerville Main Streets, and more. Hard copy applications can be filled out online by such organizations on behalf of applicants.

Applicants select their garden location preferences and will be contacted when they are at the top of the list for their choice(s). Applicants may only hold one garden plot in the City. More than one gardener may help tend to a single plot, and no immediate family members or residents at a single address will receive more than one plot. Gardeners may elect to share their garden with another individual or family to ensure that the plot is well-utilized.

Fees

Plot sizes and fees vary by garden, but plot sizes are generally about 100 square feet and plot fees range from \$15 to \$25. Fee discounts are available based on income eligibility to ensure the program is accessible to all Somerville residents; individuals can request a fee waiver on their application forms. Fees fund garden-specific projects such as tool sheds, shared tools, water supply, and also program management. Fees will be collected by Garden Coordinators. For each garden, \$5 per plot will be sent to the City of Somerville by June 1st of each year. The rest of the funds shall be spent by the Garden Coordinator on general garden maintenance and needs. Garden Coordinators will fill out a financial tracking sheet describing how the funds were spent. The completed tracking sheet will be sent to Citywide Coordinator by December 1st.

Waitlist

There is an existing waitlist for all community garden locations at this time, and new applicants for plots will be placed on the waitlist in the order that they apply. The waitlist for most gardens is at least a few years long.

ADA-accessible plots are available at most gardens for gardeners with disabilities, but may be given to gardeners without disabilities if there is no demand for an ADA-accessible plot. However, if an applicant requiring an ADA-accessible plot is next on the wait-list, when a new plot becomes available the applicant will receive the ADA-accessible plot and the current gardener without a disability must give up the ADA plot and take the newly available plot instead. Applicants without disabilities must be made aware of this stipulation if they are awarded an ADA plot.

Waitlisted applicants will be contacted annually via email (or other method if listed) to ensure they wish to stay on the list. Anyone who does not respond by the given date or declines will be removed from the waitlist.

Gardener Agreements

Upon conditional award of a plot, new community gardeners are required to sign—and then abide by—the Community Gardener Agreement included in the application form and found at the end of this document. Plot fees must be given to their Garden Coordinator along with the signed agreement at the spring cleanup (or before if unable to attend) or else the plot will be forfeited and the prospective gardener will be added to the bottom of the waitlist for that garden. There are currently no term limits for the program, except for the Lincoln Park Community Garden, where a three-year term is being piloted. The ConCom and the Citywide Coordinator will continue to evaluate wait times for garden plots to determine if term limits are needed at other gardens.

Attendance

Plot-holders are required to attend the spring cleanup/ opening day event and the fall cleanup/ close-out event, which are organized by the Garden Coordinator(s). If plot-holders are unable to

make either of these events, prior notice must be provided to their respective Garden Coordinator. In the event that plot-holders will miss either of the cleanup days, the Garden Coordinator may request that these plot-holders provide additional help caring for communal spaces on other days during the general opening and closing weeks, which are the second week of May and by the end of November, respectively. Failing to attend these required events without prior notice or reasonable cause may result in an infraction notice.

Garden Coordinators are required to attend a Conservation Commission meeting each winter, generally in February. Conservation Commission meetings are held on the 4th Tuesday of month from 7-9:00 p.m. The Conservation Agent will send an email to all Garden Coordinators with details of the meeting.

Renewal

Plot-holders will be required to submit a brief renewal form on an annual basis to confirm continued residency in Somerville, collect updated contact information, and reaffirm interest in keeping the garden plot. If a signed renewal form or annual fees are not received by the Garden Coordinator at or before the spring clean-up event, the plot may be forfeited and given to the next position on the waitlist. The plot-holder will not be returned to the waitlist unless requested.

Infractions

The community gardens are well-loved resources, and long absences from the plot or lack of upkeep can result in an infraction as there is a long waitlist of hopeful gardeners excited to maintain a plot. Garden Coordinators should routinely check plots for signs of lack of upkeep and send a notice to both the gardener in question and the Citywide Coordinator if there is a significant or repeated lack of upkeep.

Plot-holders may receive an infraction for any of the following reasons:

- Failure to clear plot by May 15th and begin gardening by June 1st
- Failure to keep their garden plot in a healthy condition (e.g. maintenance weeding, watering, or harvesting) for more than three weeks
- Failure to clean up the plot at the end of the season by the agreed-upon date
- Failure to participate in the care of common spaces, do assigned garden jobs (depending on garden), or attend cleanups without prior notice
- Other determinations at the discretion of the Garden Coordinator and Citywide Coordinator

A plot-holder may have their garden privileges revoked upon the third infraction during their tenure in the garden (i.e. infractions can occur in separate seasons). Sharing a plot is one great way to share the gardening responsibilities and reduce likelihood of infractions for lack of care for the plot. Alternatively, connecting with neighboring gardeners and attending gardener clean

up events and meet-ups is a great way to let other gardeners know when you may need help keeping up your responsibilities due to vacation or life circumstances.

Plot Maintenance

Gardeners are expected to clear and prepare their plots by May 15th and regularly maintain their garden plots from at least June 1st through October 15th. Season extension techniques are allowed if you wish to continue working on your plot through the winter. Consistent maintenance of garden plots is expected of all community gardeners. Any gardeners taking vacation(s) during the season should arrange assistance in making sure their plot is watered and maintained during their absence. The Garden Coordinator may be able to help find volunteers to assist with this maintenance, so it is a good idea to tell them in advance of any planned absences. It is also critical to let Garden Coordinators know that you expect to return and continue maintenance, and that you have not abandoned your plot.

Chemical pesticides are not allowed under any circumstances. Garden Coordinators should keep an eye out for chemical pesticide containers in the garden and offer assistance to gardeners who may need help transitioning away from their use.

Grounds Maintenance

Prior to the start of the growing season, the Conservation Agent will coordinate the delivery of mulch and stone dust to the gardens with DPW. Please email requests to Conservation Agent, and include the requested quantity of material and the ideal date of delivery.

If additional materials are needed during the growing season, or if there are grounds maintenance issues, Garden Coordinators should put in a work order via 311 by phone or online at www.somervillema.gov/311. To get assistance in following up on DPW requests, please send an email to the Conservation Agent, Malik Drayton (mdrayton@somervillema.gov) confirming the date you placed the call, what you ordered, and when you'd like the delivery.

For access to the gardens, Garden Coordinators are responsible for sharing garden lock codes with the DPW, the Citywide Coordinator and the Conservation Agent.

Program Evaluation

The program is evaluated annually via the Garden Coordinator season summary survey. Surveys should, at minimum, include: garden location, program successes and challenges, review of Garden Coordinator performance (or Citywide Coordinator review in the case of Garden Coordinators), and a general commentary section. For optimal buy-in, the Citywide Coordinator should be prepared to share how the gardener input from these evaluation methods were operationalized in the following season, or why popular ideas may not have been feasible to implement.

Somerville Conservation Commission Community Garden Agreement

1. Your name, address, e-mail address, phone number and garden assignment may be made available to the other gardeners at your site and registered with the City's Conservation Commission.
2. Each garden site decides its own annual fee (\$15 – \$35), to be paid when you receive a plot; for every fee collected \$5 goes into a general garden fund that helps to develop and promote the City's community gardens.
3. We encourage you to use the gardening season to its fullest. Your plot **must** be cleared by May 15th, and work on gardens **must** be started by June 1st at the very latest. If you fail to do so without having made arrangements with your coordinator, your plot will be reassigned to the next person on the waiting list.
4. Gardeners must keep their plots in healthy condition—weeding, watering, harvesting and clean-up. If you do not keep your plot in healthy condition, you will lose your plot.
5. The use of pesticides or herbicides is strongly discouraged. Questions or concerns should be brought to the Citywide Garden Coordinator.
6. Water use should be consistent with water conservation practices. Most gardens use city water—this is a generous donation, not to be taken for granted.
7. All gardeners will participate in care of common spaces. Coordinators will make arrangements for community meetings and clean-ups; your attendance is required.
8. Common tools are available at most sites. Please care for these tools appropriately. You may bring your own tools to work in your garden.
9. You agree to hold the City of Somerville and its agents and employees harmless for any personal injury or accidents occurring while you are working in the garden.
10. Only one plot will be allotted per family.
11. This agreement is valid for one growing season and is subject to change at the discretion of the City's Conservation Commission.
12. **Lincoln Park Community Gardeners Only:** Each gardener (or family) can hold a garden plot for a maximum of three (3) full growing seasons. After this term has expired, you may sign up to be on the waitlist again.

You understand that having a community garden plot is an opportunity—not a right. There are more people than plots. Please act accordingly and respect this privilege.

If you have any questions, please contact your site coordinator, the Citywide Garden Coordinator Tara Mitchell (somerville.gardens@gmail.com), or the Conservation Agent Malik Drayton (mdayton@somervillema.gov, 617-625-6600 x2514).