Garden-keeping in the city: Incentives & opportunities for greenspace transformation in Winnipeg’s inner city

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Research Questions
1. What barriers do resident groups encounter to keep gardens active in park areas?
2. What role do the City of Winnipeg and resident groups have to keep gardens active in park areas?
3. What park and vacant sites in Winnipeg’s inner city neighborhoods are suitable to sustain garden use?
4. How might the City’s role in garden-keeping differ between parkland and vacant land?

Research Methods
a. Conversations with public and nonprofit sector greenspace coordinators in Winnipeg.
b. Greenspace suitability analysis of Winnipeg’s inner city neighborhoods.

garden-keeping criteria

Parkland Vacant Land
4. We need to: (1) ensure each neighborhood has land protected for community garden use, (2) allow for adequate garden structures and systems, and (3) permit the sale of goods produced on parkland and vacant land.

Garden-keeping incentives

Executive Summary
The traditional act of growing food and plants as a group of people is often considered a temporary land use by academia and planning professionals in Canada. Slowly, but surely, practitioners, planning scholars and politicians around the world are beginning to contemplate the possibility of permanent land allocation for urban agriculture and community gardens. This study outlines actions City government and resident groups can take to integrate community growing into long-term greenspace strategies to address the shortage of greenspace in many dense urban areas.

Interviews in this study with greenspace coordinators helped frame the challenges of recruiting and retaining residents to keep community gardens active. These challenges include establishing a common vision for growing, finding the available space and people, securing the land over time, and building the capacity to operate and support the garden site continually. This study used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to conduct a park and vacant land suitability analysis to determine how and where the four garden-keeping challenges might be applied in the context of Winnipeg’s inner city neighborhoods.

The suitability analysis illustrates how park areas tend to increase in size and overall availability as distance to the Downtown core increases, leaving some areas in the inner city underserved with greenspace. More vacant land seems to be located in these areas already short of greenspace, which create larger patches of conditionally suitable space for community gardening. Incentives to keep gardens active in these areas might involve informal year-to-year arrangements, or formal agreements involving funding, site selection, land tenure, or operational support.