

Community Garden Information And Permit Application Packet

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INTRODUCTION

A Community Garden is an approved site, operated and maintained by committed volunteers for growing produce for non-commercial use through individual or shared plots and common areas. The produce is for the consumption by the volunteers or for donation through the community garden organization. It is operated in a manner that includes water conservation, composting, non-polluting growing practices, and integrated pest management practices that promote sustainable urban agriculture.

The American Community Gardening Association (ACGA) recognizes that community gardening improves people's quality of life by providing a catalyst for neighborhood and community development, stimulating social interaction, encouraging self-reliance, beautifying neighborhoods, producing nutritious food, reducing family food budgets, conserving resources, and creating opportunities for recreation, exercise, therapy and education.

The City of Austin (COA) recognizes the importance and need for community gardens on public land. Such gardens provide individuals and families with the opportunity to grow their own nutritious and affordable food; contribute to healthy lifestyles by encouraging physical activity; connect urban dwellers with nature and the source of their food; and create opportunities for community bonding through commitment to a common interest. The gardens also provide invaluable habitat for native wildlife, including songbirds, butterflies and other pollinators.

The City makes land available for community gardens, but it is up to the community to create, cultivate and manage each garden. This packet is intended as a guide for community leaders and groups wishing to create a community garden on City owned and managed property in Austin or to obtain City assistance with water tap waivers when starting a community garden on privately owned property. **Each community garden project proposal will require that a nonprofit organization sponsor the garden application to the City under City Code Chapter 14-7. The proposals are subject to approval by the COA's department director responsible for that property.** Following the instructions in this packet will help you plan a well organized, sustainable garden, and present a proposal with a good chance of being approved.

Please note that this application is for City supported community gardens, and is not required for creating community gardens on property owned by churches, businesses and other private entities that will not need waivers for platting, site plans or water tap fees.

To find out more about this program, contact the Sustainable Urban Agriculture coordinator at (phone and email). To check on whether your prospective site is on the list of potential properties, contact the City of Austin's Real Estate Division at 974-7090, or go to their website: (website).

STARTING A COMMUNITY GARDEN ON CITY OF AUSTIN LAND

Working together to create a community garden can be an inspiring and transformative experience for a group of neighbors. However, the steps involved in creating a community garden require a significant investment of time, energy, and patience. It is important to take time in the early stages of your planning to research and draw from the experience of others. Below are some steps to guide you as you plant the seed for a future community garden.

- 1. Organize your group.**

Be able to demonstrate the need for a new community garden, such as no gardening opportunities in the vicinity, long waiting lists at existing gardens, or long commuting distances for existing gardens. Your core group of organizers should include at least four dedicated people to be on the steering committee, and have the support of the adjacent property owners, your neighborhood association, and neighborhood businesses. There is a lot of work involved in starting a community garden so have a sufficient number of stakeholders to help sustain the effort.

- 2. Get educated.**

There are many gardening groups in Austin with information about organic food gardens. The Coalition of Austin Community Gardens (<http://communitygardensaustin.org/>) provides a great way to make contacts with community gardeners and get up to speed on available trainings and events. If possible, have one or more members of your planning group attend the United Way's Volunteer Natural Leader training, which focuses on building the skills of a volunteer leader while addressing environmental and poverty issues, or Sustainable Food Center's Community Garden Leadership trainings, which provide valuable information about starting and sustaining a community garden in Austin. For the date of the next scheduled trainings, visit <http://www.unitedwaycapitalarea.org/> or www.sustainablefoodcenter.org/events.asp.

- 3. Identify a site.**

Look for a location that receives 6-8 hours of full sunlight, is relatively free of paving, trash and debris, and is within walking distance or short commute from your gardening group. Identify the property owner of your selected site through a County Tax Assessor's office at http://www.traviscad.org/property_search.html. An ideal site for community gardens will be adjacent to a road, over 100 feet from a waterway, and have limited slope with optimal available light. A list of City-owned properties screened for these attributes and identified as potentially available for community garden development is located with the COA's Real Estate Department. Real Estate staff can identify City-owned parcels of land not on the prescreened list that may also be identified as available, following a vetting process. An important item to consider when selecting a site is water availability, since running a waterline to the property will add considerably to the cost of your community garden start up. When possible, irrigation of gardens should come from rainwater collection or alternative water sources. Contact Austin Water Utilities to determine existing infrastructure at a site. Soil testing for fertility values, pH, and heavy metal or other contamination is advised before submitting your proposal.

- 4. Locate a nonprofit to act as a sponsor for the community garden.**

The role of the nonprofit group is to provide continuity for the City properties and liability insurance. The nonprofit will also be required to enter into a license agreement with the City in support of the community group.

5. **Create & submit your Community Garden Permit Application.**

A *Community Garden Permit Application* is required to request permission to start a community garden on City of Austin owned property. The *Permit Application* includes:

- List of gardeners and contact information for steering committee members
- Design sketch for the garden
- Garden By-laws or Rules, Gardener contracts or membership agreements and waiver examples
- Project Timeline
- Budget & Fundraising Plan for first year
- Sponsoring nonprofit organization
- Letter of Support from community organization (e.g., Neighborhood Association) and from adjacent landowners

For community gardens groups applying for City support to qualify for water tap fee waivers on privately owned property, the application includes:

- List of gardeners and contact information for steering committee members
- Design sketch for the garden
- Nonprofit sponsorship
- Letter of Support from community organization (e.g., Neighborhood Association) and from adjacent landowners.
- Evidence of land control, such as a lease or deed.

Submit your application to the Sustainable Urban Agriculture Coordinator. Your application will be reviewed with the following factors in mind:

- Planned or existing uses on the site
- Impact on adjacent land uses
- Evidence of community support
- Permit requirements
- Maintenance requirements
- Implementation and ongoing cost
- Water availability

Following approval of the garden permit application, the Coordinator will direct garden groups through the process of obtaining license agreements and any other permits that may be required by City ordinances.

6. **Obtain Community Garden License Agreement**, through assistance of the Sustainable Urban Agriculture Coordinator.

7. **Organize a ground-breaking work day.** Invite all the neighbors, and dig. Your Non-Profit Sponsor, Sustainable Food Center or Austin Parks Foundation can assist you in recruiting additional volunteers to make your work day a success. Plan your workday as an inclusive and festive event—remember, the most important part of a community garden is the community. Happy Gardening!

NONPROFIT INFORMATION

The following is a list of nonprofit organizations that are potential sponsors for community groups applying for a community garden permit. There are other nonprofits in the City who can also provide this sponsorship.

Please Note: *The following nonprofit organizations are not vetted, but are being provided as potential sponsors.*

1. **Sustainable Food Center**
www.sustainablefoodcenter.org
1106 Clayton Lane
Austin, Texas 78723-2491
(512) 236-0074
2. **Sunshine Garden**
www.sunshinecommunitygardens.org
4814 Sunshine Drive
Austin, Texas 78756-3113
(512) 458-2009
3. **Austin Parks Foundation**
www.austinparks.org
816 Congress Avenue
Austin, Texas 78701
(512) 477-1566
4. **Green Corn Project**
www.greencornproject.org
1210 Rosewood Avenue
Austin, Texas 78702
(512) 249-3171
5. **Windsor Park Baptist Church (Eastside Baptist Church)**
www.tx.citysquares.com/austin/windsor-park
2400 Northeast Dr
Austin, Texas 78723-2104
(512) 929-3722
6. **Austin Green Art**
info@austingreenart.org
2906 Collins Creek, Suite B
Austin, Texas 78741
**Randy Jewart (Founder/Director)
(512) 743-4245
randy@austingreenart.org

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Thriving community gardens on City lands are achieved through a partnership between your community garden group, City departments, and a nonprofit organization. Each of these entities has a particular role to play and holds certain responsibilities, as outlined below.

COMMUNITY GARDEN GROUP

The use of City of Austin (COA) land for a community garden is contingent upon adherence to the following requirements:

Each community garden is required to establish an organizational structure. This includes the creation of a **Community Garden Leadership Committee** made up of gardeners who volunteer to take on extra duties to help the garden run smoothly. Leadership Committee roles shall include:

Site Coordinator

- Organizes community work day projects
- Keeps plots rented – meets with new gardeners and orients them to rules
- Coordinates signing and renewal of plot rental agreements
- Coordinates general garden communication
- Coordinates waste removal from site, when necessary

Treasurer

- Collects plot rental fees – fees should be used for payment of garden utilities. Remaining fees can be used at the discretion of the Community Garden Leadership Committee for minor tool purchases or repairs, general garden maintenance needs, work day refreshments, etc. Purchases of more than \$200 must be approved by all gardeners.
- Maintains fund balance and reports annually to the garden members and to the City.

Tool Coordinator

- Ensures that equipment is properly maintained and updates inventory report annually
- Makes recommendations for tool purchases to be funded from the treasury
- Organizes activities on work days for tool maintenance and repair

Compost Coordinator

- Ensures that compost area is properly maintained
- Orients new gardeners to the compost procedures
- Organizes activities on work days for compost maintenance and processing

Garden By-Laws

Each community garden must adopt guidelines for property management and operations. The required guidelines in this packet are intended to ensure that all Austin residents have equal opportunity to participate in gardens on COA property. These guidelines are meant to serve as a framework for structuring your garden, but you are permitted and encouraged to expand on them according to your garden's specific needs and circumstances.

Educational Programming

Community gardens provide abundant opportunities for education, and thus an excellent opportunity to give back to your community. Community gardens on City-owned land are required to dedicate no less than one garden plot to either an adjacent recreation center, senior center, or near by school for use in educational programs for youth or the elderly. Each Community Garden Leadership Committee will identify and/or produce two education programs for gardeners to attend each year.

Annual Reports

A report shall be submitted each year to the City Sustainable Urban Agriculture Coordinator. The report shall include:

- A narrative explaining how garden fulfilled requirement for educational programming;
- An account of:
 - number of current garden participants
 - number of plots currently rented
 - number of work days carried out and work accomplished
- An up-to-date tool inventory;
- A treasury report including:
 - quantity of plot rental fees and other income collected
 - garden expenditures
- A waiting list and timeline on list
- Any additional issues that need to be addressed.

Reports shall be submitted to the Coordinator by **(X DATE)** each year. Reports may be submitted **(digitally/by mail)** to **(email address/physical address)**.

CITY OF AUSTIN (COA)

The COA provides the following services to community garden groups:

- 1) Identification of available City property
- 2) Direction and assistance in the process of securing use of available City property
- 3) Access to City owned land

Once your *Community Garden Application* has been approved and licensing and all required permitting is completed, your gardening group will receive approval to proceed. City departments reserve the right to terminate this agreement if a community garden is found to be out of compliance with the requirements listed in the guidelines or its licensing agreement, or if land use needs have changed.

- 5) Resources and Assistance

The City can provide the following services for your garden:

- Installation of a standard park sign with the community garden name, hours and contact information
- Basic design templates and technical assistance
- GIS coordinates for accurate boundary delineation and inventory purposes

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Sponsorship

Community groups wishing to create gardens on City land will apply for sponsorship by nonprofit organizations for assistance with some or all of the following:

- Technical assistance, including assistance creating and submitting your *Community Garden Proposal*
- Liaison with City and other community organizations
- Solicitation of grant funds for garden design, infrastructure and construction costs
- Liability insurance during construction
- Paying water utility invoices
- Holding and managing unrestricted and restricted funds generated through grants and donations, and plot rental fees
- Recruitment of volunteers to help with installation

Education Opportunities

Gardening workshops and classes can be found at:

- Austin Area Garden Council at Zilker Botanical Garden www.zilker garden.org
- Austin Organic Gardeners at www.main.org/aog/
- The Great Outdoors Garden Adventure at www.gonursery.com
- Green Corn Project at www.greencornproject.org/gc/
- Keep Austin Wild at www.Keepaustinwild.com
- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at www.wildflower.org
- The Natural Gardener at www.naturalgardeneraustin.com
- Sustainable Food Center at www.sustainablefoodcenter.org
- Citizen Gardener – <http://citizengardener.ning.com/>
- Austin Permaculture Guild – www.austinperm.com
- Travis County Master Gardener Association – www.tcmastergardeners.org

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Community garden design must include the following elements:

- Plot organization. Allow for a minimum of 10 plots, between 10'x10' and 20'x 20' in-ground plot size, and for raised bed plots, 4'x 8' in size. Pathways between beds and plots should be least 3 feet wide and kept mulched to control weeds
- Watering plan. Design a simple watering system with approximately one hose bib or faucet for every four plots. Automatic watering systems will not be allowed.
- The location of a City supplied community garden sign with the garden's name, sponsors, and a contact person's phone number for more information. Signs shall not exceed 3' x 5' in size.
- A shared composting area for the community gardeners, with space for compost piles at different stages, and a location for mulch and soil to be staged. All compost and stored materials areas must be contained to prevent runoff and sedimentation.
- Wildlife Habitat landscaping, focusing on native drought tolerant flowers and shrubs which attract butterflies and hummingbirds
- At least one plot to be provided at no charge for a nearby school, recreation center, or health center for use in education and for supplying healthy food
- A 6-foot fence around the perimeter to prevent vandalism or theft by two- and four-legged visitors. For safety reasons, fencing **may not** impede visibility into the garden. A fence higher than 6 feet will require additional permitting.

When designing a community garden, think about including these important elements and ideas:

- Tool shed. A tool shed or other structure provides a place for storing tools, supplies, and materials. Tool sheds must be no larger than 120 sq. ft. (10' x 12'), rodent-proof, and situated on the site to satisfy City setback ordinance requirements. Any larger structure will require a building permit.
- Gathering space. A social gathering space with bench or picnic table provides a place where gardeners can sit and relax, and host educational presentations, and can serve as space for a shared plant nursery and potting table.
- A community bulletin board where rules, meeting notices, and other important information can be posted.

Keep in mind:

- If pathways, pads or parking spaces are to be paved, additional permits are required.
- If obtaining a new water tap, Engineer-sealed drawings and a water tap permit is required.

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

Community gardens on City owned property are constrained by the following rules. These rules will be incorporated into the gardener agreement for use of City property.

- Watering systems that operate independently from the above ground faucets (e.g., systems on timers) are not permitted. Water restrictions and water conservation measures are to be followed. All hose end systems, such as drip lines and soaker hoses, must follow City water ordinances. Gardeners must remain on the property while watering, and keep water from running off their plot.
- To build and maintain healthy soil structure, gardeners will use compost, organic fertilizers, mulch and a rotation of plant varieties. Three inches of compost shall be maintained to prevent soil loss and compaction.
- All piles of mulch, soil and compost will be contained to prevent runoff and sedimentation.
- Gardeners will maintain an effective composting system so garden waste can become usable compost to help maintain soil structure and fertility.
- No chemical treatments of herbicides, pesticides, or fungicides, and no synthetic fertilizers are allowed.
- No fuel storage is allowed on site.
- The use of chemically treated wood is not allowed.
- Garden curfew is between 10 pm and 5 am.
- No alcohol, illegal substances, or glass containers are allowed on community garden property. Storage of fuel is also not allowed on community garden property.
- No illegal substances may be grown.
- No driving on the site except to unload gardening items, or for brush pick-up and mulch deliveries or by City vehicles.
- No trees are to be planted within the garden plots. Before growing plants 4'-6' in height, gardeners will obtain permission from adjacent plot owners whose plantings may receive excessive shade.
- Gardeners should not dig trenches around the perimeter of their plots, and should not extend their garden dimensions.
- Pets must be on leashes within the community garden fencing, and the pet owners must clean up after pet.
- Any additional structures must be approved by the City.
- Animal enclosures must be approved by the City, including bee hives/frames and chicken coops/tractors.
- All lawn areas within the community garden boundaries that are outside of the garden plots are to be kept mowed.
- A Community garden is considered abandoned if left unattended for more than four (4) weeks. Notices shall be sent to the Garden Site Coordinator and Community Garden Leadership Committee by City landowner department or the Sustainable Urban Agriculture

Coordinator. *(First notice sent out on week four (4), second notice sent week six(6)* If abandoned, then the site is subject to having the license agreement terminated, and being decommissioned as a Community Garden.

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GARDEN OPERATION GUIDELINES

These guidelines are required for directing gardeners on City property. All sites will have By-Laws that incorporate these guidelines.

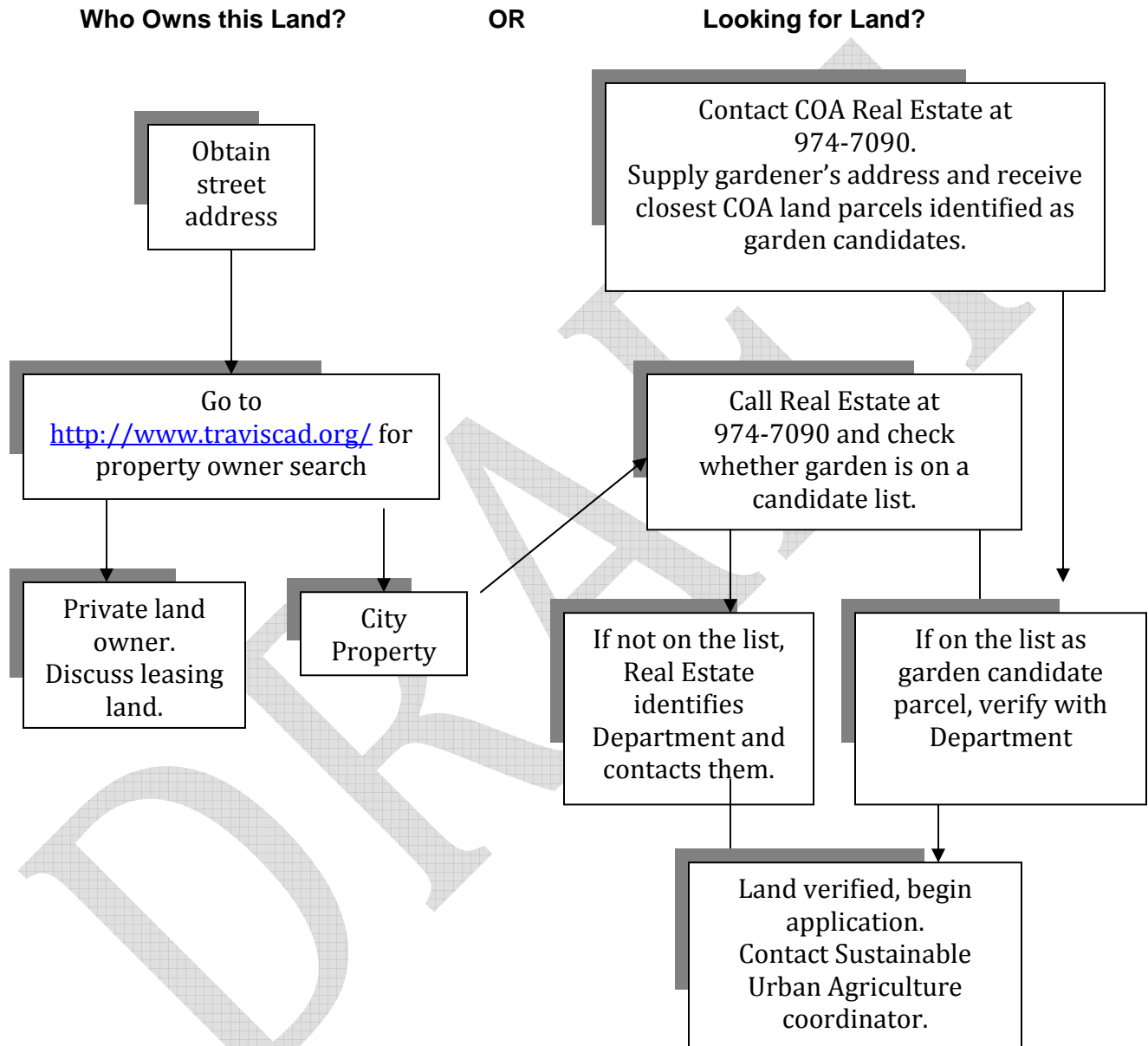
- Each Community Garden will have a Community Garden Leadership Committee with a Site Coordinator, Treasurer, Compost Coordinator, and Tool Coordinator, at a minimum. These volunteer positions are voted on yearly. See "Roles & Responsibilities" for descriptions of required duties.
- The Community Garden Site Coordinator and Sustainable Urban Agriculture Program Coordinator shall not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, materials status, age, sect, sexual orientation, or disability, in its community garden membership and the administration of its programs.
- There shall be no harassment, threats, verbal abuse or acts of violence by any person against another person. Such acts must be reported to the Community Garden Leadership Committee and the perpetrator is subject to plot forfeiture.
- A gardener may rent only one plot within the City owned properties of community gardens. If a gardener has a small plot and wishes to rent a larger plot, they may switch to the larger plot when one becomes available, however, they must relinquish the smaller plot.
- Gardeners may not turn over their plot to another person; instead, the plot must be rented out to the next person on the waiting list.
- Gardeners must have their plot planted within two weeks of signing a contract, or be subject to plot forfeiture, and the plot will be reassigned.
- Gardeners are required to control pest grasses and weeds and harvest produce in a timely manner. A garden plot is considered abandoned after two weeks without maintenance. If a gardener cannot care for their plot for a length of time due to extenuating circumstances, they should contact the Site Coordinator and make arrangements for care and maintenance.
- A garden plot left neglected/unattended (un-watered and/or overrun with weeds) for more than two (2) weeks without prior notice or arrangements with the Community Garden Leadership Committee shall be considered abandoned. Notices shall be sent by the Garden Site Coordinator and followed up on by the Community Garden Leadership Committee. *(First notice sent out on week two, second notice sent week four)* The Community Garden Leadership Committee will vote to determine if the plot in question will be forfeited and made available to the next person on the waiting list.
- Gardeners must remove all of their garbage from the site, and recycle and reuse as much as possible. Recycling services will not be provided to the site by the City.
- Gardeners, at the end of their gardening contract, will remove all vegetation, tools, structures and debris from their plot.
- Common areas, such as communal plots, trash receptacles, compost bins, are the shared responsibility of all gardeners. The community garden needs to be maintained in a neat state. Gardeners may not store their personal items in common areas of the garden.
- Attendance and participation in community garden work days as defined by the Site By-Laws, is mandatory for gardeners and gardening partners as listed on the contract agreement.

- Plant and food sales require approval by the Director of the Department managing the City owned property and shall be for the benefit of the Community Garden only.

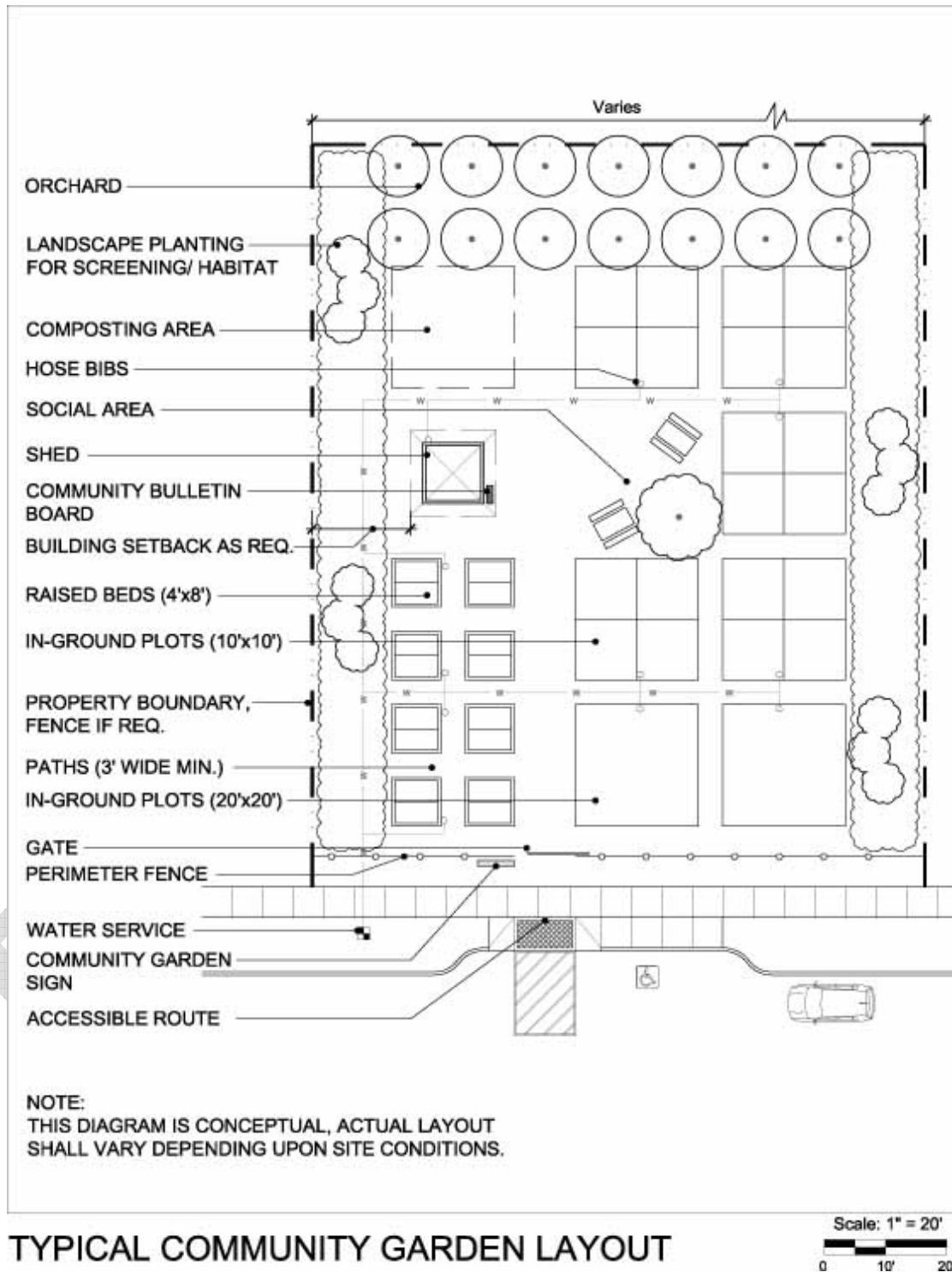
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AUSTIN COMMUNITY GARDEN

START UP PROCESS



DESIGN LAYOUT TEMPLATE



TYPICAL COMMUNITY GARDEN LAYOUT