

THE HISTORY OF RAILWAY GARDEN

The original idea for the community garden in Princes Hill was generated from a discussion between Cr Jackie Fristacky and Dianna Walpole, manager of the Princes Hill Community Centre in 2008. It seemed a logical contribution to the council's new sustainability strategy.

Following a well-attended public meeting on July 17th, 2008, a group of 25-plus interested gardeners was established. Council welcomed the initiative inviting the group to become a community partner of council and offering substantial funding. Council suggested various possible sites on the Hardy Gallagher Reserve. Unfortunately, poor communication led to a series of local objections. Following this there were a few years of controversy regarding the garden.



The gardening group persevered, establishing an attractive guerrilla garden alongside the bocce court by the Railway House Neighbourhood House, planter boxes beside the Princes Hill Community Centre and running gardening workshops and excursions. Committed community gardeners continued to try to negotiate to establish a garden. However, in 2014, with no agreement on a site and reducing support from Council it was decided to wind up this group and to disincorporate. At this point the president of the gardening group

negotiated with the Railway House Neighbourhood House to take over care of the guerrilla garden.



The Railway House gradually developed an interest in a community garden and in 2016 decided to request Council to convert the disused bocce court to community garden. A core of devoted and persistent volunteers negotiated, submitted



plans and proposals and worked through the process enabling the garden to be approved by council and finally to be established in 2020. The years of opposition had helped the gardeners to clarify the style of garden which would work in this neighbourhood. Hallmarks were that it would be unfenced, open to all and that the model would not be the usual model of individually managed plots, but would be communally run. Helping with food security locally, supporting the community lunch and contributing

to the issue of reducing food miles by local growing were important ideas underpinning the garden. Connecting community through the garden was most important. The collective garden would offer an accessible way for local people to be involved in a community sustainability project, learning together and sharing skills and friendship along the way. Teaching inner city dwellers how to garden

and educating them about sustainability while providing a community focal point and project and fostering community involvement were also important.

While negotiating with Council Officers the gardeners also requested local landscape architect Bruce Echberg to draw a design for the garden which he did free of charge. This gave something concrete that people could respond to.

Following extensive community consultation in February and March 2018 Council approved the establishment of a garden. On June 5, 2018 Council finally approved the establishment of a Community Growing Space in principle with a resolution which read in part:

Council (b) notes that the conversion of the court area for a shared growing space and the retention of one lane for bocce presents an option that satisfies the majority vision of those who participated in the consultation; (c) authorizes officers to commence the process of preparing a licence agreement over the site currently defined by the bocce court plus the garden bed immediately south of the existing fence line (consistent with the plan in Attachment 6) to the North Carlton Railway House Neighbourhood House to improve the site, and manage the site for gardening purposes on behalf of the community, with the use of one lane being available for bocce or like use.



The garden was constructed during 2020 and as soon as the long 2020 COVID lockdown finished was planted out at the beginning of November 2020. While the building and first planting of the garden happened during COVID 19 pandemic, which meant some extra challenges, it also offered a great sense of hope and opportunity for community involvement. Being an outdoor activity, it allowed people to continue to access the garden, to work in small

groups, to harvest produce, to meet and chat while abiding by COVID restrictions. Unlike other projects which have shut down, it has continued to thrive and is rarely empty. At any time of the day people of all ages can be seen wandering through, picking a handful of produce, children asking question, admiring sunflowers, picking snap sugar peas, or simply taking a break in a cycle or walking outing.