

Gardening Report to the JBNA Board, April & May, 2023

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The two busiest months of the gardening year, filled with events and, this year, building new gardens too. As usual, anything that needs particular Board attention is in bold.

Menzies/Michigan Seed Box Garden

- Unexpected excitement (and work) occurred when we discovered on a Friday (by casually chatting to the contractor) that about 1/3 of one of the boulevards was going to be dug up on Monday. A frantic call out for help produced enough volunteers to lift and store the plants, and the garden has now been replanted. It's also now larger, so we'll need to buy a few more plants and stepping stones. I notified Alex Harned at the City about the communication failure; we've figured out where the problem was and Alex is working to fix it at the City so we get adequate notice in the future.
- We have removed the grass and plastic landscape fabric from around the parking lot tree. The soil under plastic was lifeless and compacted, so we have put a thick layer of leaf mulch down to start soil restoration, and will plant in the fall.
- The volunteers on this project helped the JB United Church mulch the site of their new native plant garden. We have also agreed to provide cut flowers each week for the community lunch.

The Wee Free Seed Box

- The seed box was out of operation for several weeks due to construction at the corner.
- Seed packing continued, with over 1000 packets produced so far this year.

Fisherman's Wharf Herb Garden

- We held the first monthly 'open garden' drop in, with an attendance of 10, including two keeners who arrived (separately) with scissors and small paper bags ready to harvest.
- Other than the mysterious manifestation of a large pink wheelbarrow, it's mostly been routine maintenance and spring planting here.

The Food Trees

- Water supplies have been confirmed for another year, watering has started, and spring maintenance of tree circles has been done.

Huntingdon Manor Allotments

- The new in-ground plots have been built and plot holders started planting on the Victoria Day weekend. This took three work parties, each with 10-12 volunteers, a mix of hotel staff, plot holders, and volunteers from other garden projects. The raised beds have been built but are not yet installed. Remaining to be done: gravel area, install raised beds, fence. These are primarily hotel responsibilities in our division of labour and they are being delayed due to the hotel, like everyone else, being short-staffed.

- I have been working with a small group of returning plot holders to revise the plot holders' agreement to reflect the new, longer-term operation of the garden, which will require more participation from the users. It will be ready shortly.

Lewis Park Commons Garden

- Our garden proposal was finally approved by council. We don't have the formal License of Occupation yet, but approval gave us the right to proceed 'officially'. Our compost was delivered the next morning and the two beds scheduled for expansion this spring were finished by that evening. We are now planting up the whole garden.
- There is a good group of five volunteers working on this, all of whom live nearby; most have no gardens of their own.

Montreal Street Berry Patch

- This garden was also approved by council but we don't yet have the License of Occupation, nor has the garden been built. Other work has started at the site, however, so presumably the garden will be installed after that has been completed.

Spring events

- The Spring Plant Swap was, I think, our best ever, with plants in good condition, lots of trades, people there the whole time (no lulls), and the biggest donation total yet (almost \$900). This was the first time we took e-transfer donations and that worked very well.
- The Get Growing, Victoria food seedling distribution, which we run as a partner with the City, went without a hitch and all our plants, except for a few collards, found new homes before closing time for the first time ever. As with the mulch, demand seems to have really increased this spring and we will have to start ordering larger quantities. As usual, we supplied the JB Community Project with flats of seedlings which they passed on to their program clients.

Miscellaneous

- I gave a community gardening walking tour to a UVic environmental studies field school class, about 20 students, with lots of good questions. They were doing an 'urban food growing' day, starting with Chris Adams as a private urban homestead, then us (MSAG, herb garden, berry patch site, food trees, Huntingdon) for community-run growing, and ending with Mason St Farm as a commercial operation.
- More bridge-building: at the food seedling distribution, I was approached by a staff member from the Garth Homer house on Government Street, as they are starting a small gardening program for a few residents. I am helping them get plants and have been invited for a tour and garden consult.

Suggestion for the bridge-building grid discussed at strategic planning: Can we identify care and social-service housing providers and make sure their staff and/or residents get included in community planning?

