

# **Baltimore Green Space**

## **A Land Trust for Community-Managed Open Space**

### **Land Use Guidelines for Sites Protected by Baltimore Green Space**

Baltimore Green Space, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, acquires land on behalf of committed community groups that have established gardens and pocket parks on what were once vacant parcels. By doing so, Baltimore Green Space ensures that the community project is not displaced by development, and eases the burden of local groups by shouldering the responsibilities of acquisition, ongoing ownership, and providing basic insurance liability coverage. Baltimore Green Space protects community-managed green spaces so that they will continue to enhance the neighborhood's quality of life for years to come.

Once the land comes under Baltimore Green Space's protection, a formal partnership is established between the community leader responsible for the project (the "Site Manager"), a partner organization in the community, and Baltimore Green Space. This agreement outlines the roles and responsibilities appropriate to the interests of each partner in stewarding the community project and protected land.

#### **Baltimore Green Space's Land Stewardship Responsibilities**

Baltimore Green Space provides basic **liability insurance coverage**. This coverage applies to all properties owned or leased by Baltimore Green Space.

**Baltimore Green Space signs** are posted on all Baltimore Green Space-protected land to let passersby know the role the organization plays and to provide contact information. This sign is discreet in size and permanently posted at the entrance to the site.

Each year Baltimore Green Space staff visits all protected land to conduct what is known in land conservation terms as "**land monitoring**." It's a kind of surveying activity that includes conversations with community partners for the project, walking the land to assess conditions, and documenting the community project and legal boundaries of the land. The results of these reports are used to defend the land in cases of encroachment, provide a historical record of the community's efforts, and guide Baltimore Green Space's efforts to respond to challenges community partners may be facing.

#### **Community Partners: Site Manager's & Partner Organization's Responsibilities**

Baltimore Green Space's stewardship of protected land complements the crucial role that local leaders and residents play in the long-term success of community-managed open spaces.

As the leader of this site, the Site Manager and Partner Organization will need to act as **liaisons and strong partners** with Baltimore Green Space on an ongoing basis. This strong partnership will provide increased opportunities to share information about lessons learned and potential challenges and dangers before they become real threats to the project's

long-term viability in the community. This also means remaining aware of and communicating with Baltimore Green Space about events, changes in your garden's leadership, or changes in the area that could have a negative impact on your project.

Baltimore's community gardens and pocket parks are wonderfully diverse, reflecting the character of their neighborhoods. The guidelines that follow don't seek to make the open spaces similar; they are simply requirements that will allow Baltimore Green Space to fulfill its public purpose and maintain its ownership and liability coverage of protected sites.

## **Land Use**

Baltimore Green Space is a **land conservation-oriented** organization. Land protected by Baltimore Green Space is done so on behalf of agreed-to land uses already in place. The following activities are not allowed as these activities would jeopardize Baltimore Green Space's insurance coverage so that Baltimore Green Space can no longer maintain ownership and protection of the land:

No part of the community project can be used for dogs or as dog runs. It is advisable to use a **"No Dogs Allowed"** sign on the site to send this message to others who may not have a copy of these guidelines. (A "Curb Your Dog" sign is confusing, as it suggests to dog owners that they can use the project as a dog area.)

**No vehicles** of any kind can be parked on the land, and paving or laying cement pads on the land for parking spaces is not allowed.

No part of the community project can be used for **organized sports**.

If there are plans to hold **large community gatherings** on the property that may attract over 300 people, the Site Manager or a representative from the Partner Organization must notify Baltimore Green Space and must obtain additional insurance coverage for the event.

## **Public Access**

**Public access** to the site will need to be a priority. Perimeter treatments such as hedges or fences should encourage public visual and physical access without obstructing the right-of-way. The amount and type of public access appropriate for each site will vary depending on the designated use of the land. For example, physical access to vegetable gardens may need to be limited to keep the produce safe from destruction or theft. If a fence is required, there should be ample room between fence pickets so passersby can see the garden. Sites that function as "passive" parks with walkways and seating areas may not need any fencing at all.

Here are some public access options to consider based on how the land is used:

Entirely accessible sites are encouraged for community projects that are mostly intended to beautify the area without much, if any, food grown. This means that there are no fences or gates in place. However, this is not the best approach in all circumstances.

For projects that have some passive/beautification areas as well as vegetable gardens, partially fenced sites can be a great option as the vegetable growing area could be

fenced and the rest of the land unfenced to ensure that part of the land remains protected for growing vegetables and part remains open to the public.

Entirely fenced sites with locked gates are less viable as open spaces but in some cases may be necessary for safety and security. In these cases, the Site Manager or a representative from the Partner Organization should have the site open to the public during posted days and times but can keep the gates locked as necessary. When a garden cannot establish set times, a sign should be posted that includes the garden name, times when the garden is most likely to be open, and contact information so that people can find out how to get involved in the project or simply ask for a tour.

### **Structural Elements**

**No permanent buildings or structures such as homes or garages** should be in place on the land. Such structures would jeopardize Baltimore Green Space's insurance coverage so that Baltimore Green Space can no longer maintain ownership and protection of the land.

**No traditional playground equipment** should be in place on the land. In addition, any sculptures or non-traditional playground equipment must meet current safety standards established by the National Parks and Recreation Association, and needs to be reviewed by Baltimore Green Space prior to construction. No structures may be installed that would jeopardize Baltimore Green Space's insurance coverage so that Baltimore Green Space can no longer maintain ownership and protection of the land.

**Water features** such as ponds or fountains are not allowed due to their enormous safety risks. In addition, these features would jeopardize Baltimore Green Space's insurance coverage so that Baltimore Green Space can no longer maintain ownership and protection of the land.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** It is important to obtain written permission from Baltimore Green Space before making any substantial structural changes or improvements to the land or project, or before the addition of any domesticated animals. Such changes could jeopardize Baltimore Green Space's insurance coverage so that Baltimore Green Space can no longer maintain ownership and protection of the land.

### **Maintenance**

**Hardscape Maintenance** is very important. You will need to keep seating areas, walls, and fences in safe and attractive conditions at all times. Not doing so sends a message to others that the project and land are unvalued and not cared for, which may lead to illegal use of the land and general disrespect of the project.

**Softscape Maintenance** is also a high priority and the Site Manager and Partner Organization must have or continue to gain knowledge of general plant and project care. For example, it is important to keep small trees on the property and in the planting strip between the sidewalk and curb watered in the heat of the season and especially during a drought. It is also important to provide reasonable lawn and flower watering and maintenance, including lawn mowing, weeding, pruning, removal of overgrown vegetation, and proper composting if possible.

Often the weather, neighbors, or passersby discard any number of things on the street, sidewalk, and neighboring land. **Litter and debris** can be managed as long as removing garbage from the project and the planting strip is a constant activity. Not doing so results in much more garbage on site and sends a message to others that the project and land are unvalued and not cared for, which may lead to other illegal uses of the land and general disrespect for the community project.

**Use of Water** is important for a sustainable site. Baltimore Green Space sites must have an identified source of water. If your site does not have a ground hydrant installed you may try other potential water sources:

- Request use of a fire hydrant for water by contacting the Cooperative Extension and the City of Baltimore, or
- Get permission from a nearby property owner to use their water source.

Baltimore Green Space encourages sites to install a ground hydrant on-site whenever this is feasible.

Site Managers and Partner Organizations must be responsible for the **planting strips and sidewalks** that border the project. Planting strips should be watered if necessary, especially if trees were newly planted, and routinely cleared of garbage. Bushes, trees, and hedges should not interfere with the sidewalk and should be kept cut back and thinned out enough to provide transparency and avoid providing hiding places. The sidewalks should also be kept clear of snow, ice, and debris.

It is important to consider the **aesthetics** of your community project. For example, perimeter treatments such as fences, small walls, berms, and landscaping can be artistic elements and positive features of the neighborhood. All project hardscape and softscape elements should be designed and built to blend in, complement, and/or accentuate other features of the surrounding neighborhood without blocking views into the garden.

### **Signage**

**Additional signage** may be developed by the Site Manager and Partner Organization and can provide for great opportunities to let others know about the garden. However, these signs should not be too large as to overly dominate the project or distract from the aesthetics. Be sure to include other organizations on such signage if they are contributing to your efforts. This can be a terrific relationship-building tool.

**Promotional advertisements, political signs, or religious signs** should not be posted on Baltimore Green Space-protected lands.

### **Other Resources**

In addition to the above requirements, community gardeners must often consider issues such as community involvement, plant selection, and overall garden design. Baltimore is lucky to have a number of organizations with expertise in these areas. Please use the hand-out “Resources for Community Greeners,” and feel free to call Baltimore Green Space if you want to discuss which organization could best help you.