



HISTORY OF THE EAST MELBOURNE COMMUNITY GARDEN

2003-2020



EAST MELBOURNE COMMUNITY GARDEN ASSOCIATION INC

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HISTORY OF THE EAST MELBOURNE COMMUNITY GARDEN

Origins 2003-2004

Moves to establish a community garden in East Melbourne began in 2003, when Shelley Faubel had the idea and talked with Jenny Noyce. The two of them then embarked on an arduous process to pursue this idea. They talked with other residents and established that there was broad support for the idea in the East Melbourne community.

An informal steering committee was established, led by Jenny and Shelley, to further investigate the concept. Consultations were held with other community gardens around Melbourne, to understand their models of operation. The group Cultivating Community, which operated the community garden at the public housing estate in Collingwood was particularly helpful, with Ben Neil being the main contact and resource person. Ben organized a mini bus tour of various community gardens around Melbourne and there were site visits to a number of them. The positive response from the people involved in these gardens demonstrated the strong community spirit associated with community gardens

Initial contact was made with Council, with the key contacts being Councillor Kate Redwood and Group Manager Parks and Gardens, Vince Haining. Council encouraged the steering Committee to progress the concept and to gauge public support, prior to submitting a formal proposal to Council. There was ongoing liaison with Angela Hill, Council's Senior Parks Planner, who was of great assistance from these early discussions up until 2015.

The East Melbourne Group was contacted for support and a meeting was held with the then President, who advised that EMG saw its focus as being on other issues and this initiative was not within its areas of interest.

The steering committee produced a letterhead and logo and undertook preliminary work on the steps necessary to incorporate an association under Victorian Consumer Protection legislation.

Inaugural Public Meeting 7 October 2004

A public meeting was advertised around East Melbourne and 14 people attended, with a further 15 apologies from interested people.

The meeting, in the Powlett Street Community Centre, chaired by Matt Faubel, supported the establishment of an East Melbourne Community Garden. The interim steering committee outlined the work done to date and there was discussion about the practicalities of operating a community garden, including size of plots, finance planning and rules.

At that time a number of potential sites were discussed, but there were no firm possibilities and this was to be a key part of the discussions with Council.





The meeting elected an Interim Committee of Management, comprising Deirdre Basham, Trish Buckley, Nina Crone, Shelley and Matt Faubel, Charlie Hohnen, Catherine Littlejohn, Robyn McGrath, Angela Mercer, Jenny Noyce, Greg Redmond and Roger Smith.

The Interim Committee was charged with responsibility for clarifying the vision, developing a constitution and rules for incorporation, developing a submission to Council and pursuing sites.

At its subsequent meeting, the Committee elected the following office bearers:

President : Jenny Noyce
Secretary : Robyn McGrath
Treasurer : Deidre Basham

The Committee drew up a work program including refinement of the concept, enlisting Council support and finding a site.

Search for a site 2005 – 2009

While the Public Meeting and the election of an Interim Committee of Management represented a promising step, it was the start of a long and often frustrating process to make the community garden a reality.

Work was done around incorporation, including the preparation of draft rules and by-laws, but this was kept on hold until a site could be found, which was a difficult challenge. This entailed voluminous correspondence, telephone calls and meetings with Council officers. Part of the challenge was that there was mixed support at officer level in Council, which meant that the Committee had to keep working hard to make the case on behalf of the community.

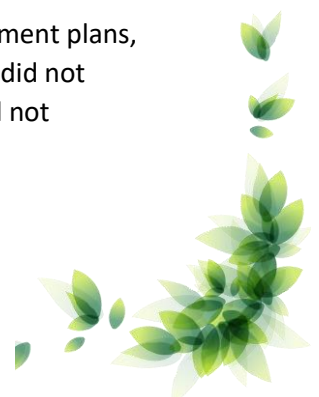
Over the years a number of the original committee members left the area or had to respond to other priorities, but a core group of the committee continued its efforts with David Woodward being invited to join and providing significant assistance. This group put in a huge effort, exploring a number of sites:

Powlett Reserve

A site adjacent to the Community Centre was considered. While this had the benefit of being part of an existing cluster of community activities, the concept did not get very far as there were concerns about reducing the amount of land available to the public.

Council Depot Fitzroy Gardens

This was a promising option as it was a large site and Council was drawing up redevelopment plans, which would have enabled inclusion of a community garden. However, Council officers did not consider a community garden to be an appropriate use for this site and the proposal did not proceed.





Area near Melbourne Cricket Ground

This site, in Yarra Park, looked very promising as it entailed an area for garden plots, as well as the old caretaker's cottage, which could be used as a centre for a range of community groups, including the community garden, the Men's Shed, Friends of the Elms and mothers and children to use the cottage.. Work was done to draw up plans and to advance the proposal and this site was regarded as particularly promising, as it could be a valuable community resource with BBQs, children's play area and the opportunity to keep chickens. Council was very supportive of the use of this site and we had on-site meetings with Council of Everyone was shocked when one day the cottage was demolished, as the Melbourne Cricket Club decided to use the site was to grow turf for the MCG cricket pitches.

Former East Melbourne Olympic Games Police Station

This site, in Wellington Parade held a lot of promise. With the former police station demolished, the site was vacant for several years and would have made an ideal community garden location. The site was in State government ownership, managed by VicTrack. Through the local state MP, Bronwyn Pike, the Transport Minister was approached and the Committee was given the green light to pursue the proposal. Much work was done to prepare site concepts, including layouts, with input from a range of experts. An application was made to Council for funding support to establish the community garden on this site.

A major issue was dealing with contamination on the site, resulting from its historic use as a railways area. In consultation with experts, solutions were found to deal with this issue, by sealing the contaminated ground and building raised garden beds. The Committee commenced negotiations with VicTrack for a lease and things looked promising. A protracted process of planning and negotiations ensued, with mixed messages from VicTrack about the ultimate plans for the site. These discussions continued even after the Sinclair's Cottage site became available, as the Victrack site had the attraction of being much larger. However, VicTrack declined the CoM overtures in 2009.

Sinclair's Cottage

The area behind Sinclair's Cottage had been on the Committee's radar for some time, but was not the first priority, as the site was not large enough for an ideal number of plots. However, after none of the other sites were viable, this became the focus of efforts, at least as an interim solution. The site was used by Council for storage of bins and other equipment used in the Fitzroy Gardens, with an asphalt area and a garden area, which was not actively used.

Following the refusal by VicTrack to allow utilization of the former Police Station site, lobbying of the Lord Mayor and senior officers of Council occurred in 2009 to come up with a site either Sinclair's Garden or another site ie roof top garden in the Collins St area or another under-utilised Council owned property. The community emphasised the need for an enduring solution.





Formal Establishment - 2009

Efforts to establish the community garden were buoyed by Robert Doyle, who had been elected as Lord Mayor in 2008. When the Committee lobbied all candidates prior to the election in 2008, he had expressed support and a meeting with him was arranged in 2009, attended by Jenny Noyce, Shelley Faubel and David Woodward. Cr Doyle confirmed his full support and undertook to arrange a site visits with senior Council officers. Cr Doyle's ongoing support, as Lord Mayor, contributed significantly to the ultimate establishment of the community garden.

While the Committee still wanted to keep open the option of a larger site, everyone agreed that a start should be made with the Sinclair Cottage location.

Licence offered to use Sinclair's Cottage site

Following that meeting, an exchange of correspondence occurred and the Lord Mayor advised the Sinclair's Garden site would be made available to the East Melbourne Community and discussions then took place.

In a meeting on 1 October 2009, with Rob Adams, Director, City Design and Urban Environment, Council offered a licence, at a peppercorn rental of \$1.00 per annum, to use the Sinclair's Cottage site for a limited period (one year initially but may be up to two years with 3months notice). The site would provide up to 10 plots (maximum) depending on the final layout agreed by Council

Council also offered the following assistance:

- Construction of the plot boxes and provision of the soil etc;
- Provision of a water tank subject to a Heritage permit;
- access to toilets on the site; and
- access to and use of a shed for storage of garden tools etc.

This provided the Committee with a basis to go back to the community with a formal proposal to establish an Incorporated Association.

Meeting to establish Incorporated Association

A meeting, was held in the East Melbourne Library on 29 October 2009, where the history, over many years, of working towards a community garden was explained. Matt Faubel and David Woodward outlined the process for incorporation. It was agreed by the meeting that incorporation of the East Melbourne Community Garden Group be pursued.

The minutes of the meeting record thanks to Jenny Noyce and Shelley Faubel for their efforts over the years in pursuing the establishment of a community garden for residents.

The meeting adopted a Statement of Purpose for the Community Garden, prepared by the Interim Committee which emphasised the community and social aspects, as well as gardening:





Statement of Purpose

To provide an opportunity for the residents of East Melbourne to participate in the establishment, operation and maintenance of a community garden in East Melbourne with objectives including promotion of:

- Community spirit and engagement
- sustainability
- health and well being
- empowerment and access for all ages and abilities
- contribution to the broader community
- education and skills development
- creativity

The following Office Bearers were elected unanimously:

President: David Woodward
Vice President: Jenny Noyce
Treasurer: Jeff Bailey
Secretary: Deirdre Basham
Membership Secretary: Shelley Faubel
Committee Members: Matt Faubel and Ann Bailey
Public Officer: David Woodward

First meeting of members

Membership applications were enabled following the public meeting and the first meeting of members was held on 9 December 2009. Initially there were six members (individuals and joint memberships by couples) and it was agreed to inform the community that four more applications could be received, as ten plots would be available. The number of applications exceeded the available plots and people were placed on a waiting list. This excess demand has continued over the life of the EMCGA.

Fees were set at \$25 entrance fee and \$150 annual ploholders fee, to cover initial establishment and operating costs.

On the recommendation of the Committee, a set of Rules was adopted. This had been prepared by David Woodward, with pro-bono legal advice from Damian Clarke, to whom thanks was expressed.

The minutes of the meeting record a vote of thanks to David Woodward for the considerable work undertaken by him in getting the EMCGA to this stage.





Incorporation

Following the public meeting, the Committee applied for incorporation and the East Melbourne Community Garden Association Inc was registered on 11 December 2009.

Commencement of the Garden – 5 February 2010

Construction of the garden plots was undertaken by CityWide, the Council’s contractor, in December 2009 and January 2010 and on 5 February 2010, Council informed the President that members were allowed to have access and could commence to use their plots.

This marked the culmination of seven years of hard work and persistence by the East Melbourne community and the leaders of the Community Garden.





The First Decade 2010-2020

The first three years saw the Community Garden become established with enthusiasm from its members.

In late 2012 early 2013 the Committee was advised by the CoM that it was contemplating terminating the licence for EMCG at Sinclair's Garden as the City (Parks and Garden) were desirous of returning the garden at the rear of Sinclair's Cottage to its so called 'original state'.

This again turned the Committee's attention to look for yet another site. The initial preference was again to relook at the Police Station Site managed by VicTrack.

The Lord Mayor and CoM officers began discussions with VicTrack. The Committee of EMCGA began to canvass other sites. I.e. behind the Shell Service Station in Hoddle St, possibility of alienating a piece of land on the Wellington Pde South Park, the Powlett St reserve, and the carpark adjacent to the intersection of Flinders St and Spring St.

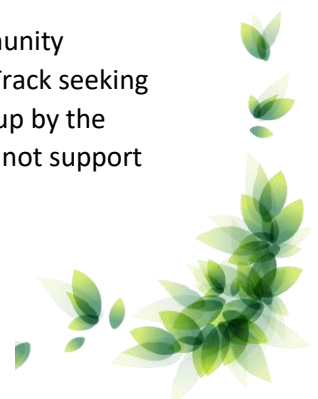
After many months the CoM advised that VicTrack had supposedly agreed to leasing the Old Commonwealth Police Station Site. Subsequently this was refuted by VicTrack that no such agreement had been reached.

An approach by EMCG was made to the then Minister for Transport to support leasing of the site. Following a meeting with the Minister's Chief of Staff, advice was received that while the MoT/Minister did not support making the carpark site available as it was part of plans for future redevelopment of the Rail Yards, there was support for the Commonwealth Police Station site to be made available. A letter of offer for the site was subsequently received from VicTrack in July 2013. However, it was apparent that the site had a number of challenges i.e. asbestos, an extensive array of underground communication pipes etc. access issues with consequent onerous legal liability issues and other challenges.

A number of plans were developed over 12 months for the site, including how best to minimise the risk of asbestos and other toxins on the site. Several meetings were held with VicTrack and CoM to discuss various aspects.

In March 2015 we were approached by the MCC/MCG Trust by way of a proposition that the East Melbourne Community Garden (EMCG) forgo the VicTrack, Lot 6 site and MCC take over this parcel of land with VicTrack agreement. The MCC proposed to undertake works at this location to realign Gate 4 entry and exit arrangements from Yarra Park to Wellington Pde and would provide, as a trade-off to EMCG, the provision of a parcel of land, part of the wicket nursery site, within Yarra Park.

The Committee considered the proposal and while it had some reservation about community reaction to alienating a piece of parkland, it discussed with CoM and then wrote to Vic Track seeking their agreement. Numerous emails were sent to VicTrack over many months as follow-up by the Committee and MCC. Finally, a response from VicTrack was received advising that it did not support





the proposal. Subsequent to this, EMCGA received advice that VicTrack were no longer prepared to offer the lease as an alternative use had been found for the site.

This left the Committee with little in the way of options as it considered the remaining sites would be difficult to justify to the community, i.e. that public land be alienated for a specific use. A discussion was held with the Lord Mayor about Council support for alienation of a parcel of land in Wellington Pde South or Powlett Reserve. He agreed there would be little or no support for such a proposal. As such he agreed that Council would not redevelop the rear of Sinclair's Garden and that EMCG could remain at the site for the foreseeable future.

In 2016 we received a CoM Community grant to increase the number of plots on the site to its current number of 23. This grant was most welcome.

Since then the garden has continued to operate actively and has become recognised as an important part of the community. There have been a few articles about it in the East Melbourne News and it receives word-of-mouth publicity. This has led to the demand for plots exceeding the available number since inception of the garden, with at times up to 30 people waiting for plots. It has been disappointing. having to tell people that they need to wait, usually for many years.

Membership

Over the years, there has been slow and steady turnover of members, as people moved away from East Melbourne or their circumstances changed, with only three of the original plottolders remaining. The fact that the Association still actively thrives, shows that it is a valued community institution.

Committee

The committee has maintained a good balance of "old hands" and fresh blood and continues to be very committed and active. The EMCGA Committee has always functioned very harmoniously, perhaps reflecting that gardening is a very positive and caring activity. In 2013 Jenny Noyce, who had been one of the originators of the Community Garden, announced her retirement due to a move to the country, and the Committee acknowledged her significant contribution over many years.

Membership of the Committee is listed in Appendix A.

Affiliation

Early in its life, EMCGA became a member of Garden Clubs of Australia Inc., a non-profit organisation which has a membership in excess of 720 affiliated clubs representing more than 45,000 individuals. Through this membership there is the opportunity for exchange of information with other garden clubs and the Association's public liability insurance is provided through this organisation.





Plot usage

Members are free to cultivate their plots as they wish, subject to maintaining tidiness and neighbourliness. This has enabled individuality to flourish and there has been much mutual admiration of the different approaches and efforts.

The diversity of plantings has also led to regular sharing of produce between members, which is very much in keeping with the ethos of the Community Garden.

For a number of years, a common herb plot was maintained, but this was ultimately converted into an additional garden plot, to enable people on the waiting list to participate.

There have only been a few occasions when members were unable to maintain their plots, resulting in them being handed over to people on the waiting list.



Social Functions

The community aspect of the Association is considered as important as the gardening and regular get-togethers, two or three times per year, have been an important part of the life of the Community Garden. These gatherings, attended by the majority of members normally start with a working bee where people work on the common areas as well as their own plots, followed by shared food and drink. The Annual General Meeting of members is traditionally held in this format.

Generally, the Association has been fortunate with the weather, except in 2018 when the gathering needed to be cancelled as record rains were causing significant flooding around the metropolitan area. The only other time a gathering needed to be cancelled was in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The social engagement of Association members has extended to other community activities, including hosting tables at the annual East Melbourne Trivia Night and participating in East Melbourne Community Days.





Pests

The Community Garden has not only attracted the interests of members but has also been popular with the possums and rats. All beds were fitted with netting to prevent pest intrusions and extermination measures are undertaken to control the rats.

On some occasions the garden has also been visited by two legged pests who have taken some of the produce, but thankfully this has been limited.

Equipment

Over the years the garden has acquired some basic equipment to be shared by members, including watering cans, spades and as well as a shredder and a composter

Finances

The Association's finances have always been healthy. The Committee has taken the approach that the available funds should cover potential works and maintenance, but that there was no need for significant surpluses. This enabled annual ploholders fees to be halved after the initial start-up period.

The Association received grants from Council to cover the initial construction costs and to enable the construction of additional beds in 2016.

Maintenance

While the beds have been solidly constructed, from time to time maintenance and repairs have been necessary, undertaken by Council approved contractors. In some years, shipments of soil have been organised, to enable members to top up their beds.

The Future

During its life, the EMCG has always adhered to the ethos that community gardening is about more than growing food; it contributes to growing of communities. Our garden has become a much loved and well-regarded community institution. It is important in the life of our suburb and its people, with strong engagement from the many people who have worked hard to achieve its establishment and sustained thriving. This provides a strong foundation for our Community Garden to continue to contribute to our wonderful East Melbourne.



**Prepared May 2020
by Matt Faubel
with input from David Woodward and Jenny Noyce.**





APPENDIX 1 COMMITTEE MEMBERS

	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
President	David Woodward	David Woodward	David Woodward	David Woodward
Vice-President	Jenny Noyce	Jenny Noyce	Jenny Noyce	Jenny Noyce
Secretary	Robyn McGrath	Robyn McGrath	Robyn McGrath	Shelley Faubel
Treasurer	Jeff Bailey	Jeff Bailey	Jeff Bailey	Matt Faubel
Membership Secretary	Shelley Faubel	Shelley Faubel	Shelley Faubel	Fiona Woodward
Committee Members	Fiona Woodward Matt Faubel	Fiona Woodward Matt Faubel	Fiona Woodward Matt Faubel	Robyn McGrath Deirdre Basham

	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
President	David Woodward	David Woodward	David Woodward James Cook (from 1.1.2016)	Matt Faubel
Vice-President	Deirdre Basham	Bob baily	James Cook	Bob Baily
Secretary	Shelley Faubel	Anna MacDonald	Peter Brent	David Woodward
Treasurer	Matt Faubel	Matt Faubel	Matt Faubel	Greg Moran
Membership Secretary	Fiona Woodward	Erin Cosgriff	Erin Cosgriff	Erin Cosgriff
Committee Members	Robyn McGrath Anna McDonald	Des Clark Shelley Faubel	Des Clark Shelley Faubel Peter Rushen	Shelley Faubel Peter Rushen

	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020
President	Matt Faubel	Matt Faubel	Matt Faubel
Vice-President	Bob Baily	Bob Baily	Bob Baily
Secretary	David Woodward	David Woodward	David Woodward
Treasurer	Peter Rushen	Peter Rushen	Peter Rushen
Membership Secretary	Erin Cosgriff	Erin Cosgriff	Ian Kelly
Committee Members	Shelley Faubel Ian Kelly	Shelley Faubel Donna Macainsh	Diane Clifford Shelley Faubel Donna Macainsh

