

## Engaging City Hall

Keeping your Mayor and City Council and, most important, your *District Council (St. Paul)/Neighborhood Association (Minneapolis)*, informed of gardening activities is a key best practice. It is vital to keep your City Council and District Council/Neighborhood Association up to date about the benefits of community gardening to gardeners as well as the larger community.

### What Gardeners Can Do

Consider having one or more gardeners act as a “political liaison”. Learn how to become politically aware and learn the ins and outs of local government so that you have a political “tool box” when the garden faces an issue and know how to publicize the garden’s public contributions to the community.

- Know who serves on your neighborhood District Council or Neighborhood Association, and get to know the staff, board and committee members and invite them to all activities.
  - In St. Paul: to find out who serves on your neighborhood District Council and who is your City Council member, call 651-266-8560 or use <http://www.stpaul.gov/council>. Click on your ward number and scroll to District Councils.
  - In Minneapolis, call 311 to find out who is your Neighborhood Association and City Councilmember
- Regularly communicate with your District Council or Neighborhood Association, and your City Councilmember about community garden activities, such as spring and fall clean-up events, garden potlucks, the Parade of Community gardens (as long as garden is participating). This can be in the form of a phone call, -email, personal letter. Even if they don’t come, make sure you keep inviting them so they remember that you’re an active contributor to the community’s quality of life..
- Invite public officials and their staff to as many events as appropriate.
- Invite your council member for a tour of the garden and opportunity to meet your fellow gardeners
- Do one of these activities above at least once a quarter, including the wintertime.
- But don’t be a “garden pest.” Make sure that your contacts with City Councilmembers and other politicians are meaningful and significant.
- Always notify public officials and staff and District Council staff of garden awards, newspaper articles, and any other kind of recognition received. Be sure to toot your own horn often (don’t be shy!).
- Serve on District Council environmental committees if they have one.

- Send your community garden newsletter, if you have one, to your city council member and to your district council/neighborhood association. Let them see you and remind them that you are there and active in the community, especially when you don't "need" anything or have any "problems."
- In your communications with elected officials and city staff, be sure to highlight your contributions to society and to your local economy (food donations, beautification, food production for families, a community space to meet neighbors, youth programming, horticultural therapy, crime prevention, community pride, environmental and nutritional education, community development and more).
- Be polite, positive, and on-message in all communications.

The more your council member is familiar with you and your garden, the more he/she can assist in the future. Also, your council member sees the gardeners as potential voters he/she will appreciate the chance to meet you in a friendly setting, such as in the community garden. "Cultivate" a positive relationship with council support staff as well as with other local government officials and employees. Staff often have quiet power and influence—don't ignore or insult them.

Many land-use decisions are made at the city level and usually need to have the approval of the City Council before they can occur. These decisions can take the form of ordinances or resolutions. City Councils are also responsible for water, zoning, sewer, garbage and recycling. If the City Council is considering changing or creating a new ordinance there is usually an opportunity for public comment at the council public hearings.

### **Nuts and Bolts of Attending a City Council Meeting**

Below are some helpful tips if you would like to visit a City Council meeting in either Minneapolis or St. Paul. Call GardenWorks with any questions.

#### ***St. Paul City Council***

- St. Paul City Council meets the first four Wednesdays of the month (don't meet the fifth Wednesday of the month) at 3:30pm in St. Paul City Hall, 15 W. Kellogg Blvd, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, City Council Chambers.
- Enter St. Paul City Hall on either Kellogg or 4<sup>th</sup> St. and allow 5-10 minutes to get through security. There are bike racks on Kellogg Blvd and St. Peter Street.
- Park at a meter or in Victory Parking Ramp on Wabasha St. (one way going north) between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets.
- You can attend any meeting. They are aired on Cable Channel 18 and are available on the web as both live broadcasts and as archived recordings (the broadcasts require Internet Explorer and Windows Media Player).
- After the live broadcast, the City Council meetings air 4 times. Thursday at 5:30pm, Saturday at 12:30pm, and Sunday at 1:00pm on Cable Channel 18.

- There is no dress code, but it is always a good idea to look presentable, just in case you end up talking with someone such as a councilmember or an aide.
- An agenda will be given to all visitors. If you would like to get the agenda beforehand, call The Office of the City Council at 651-266-8560 and ask for it. Agendas are set two weeks prior to the meeting, with last minute changes possible. You can sign up to receive the agendas by email at <http://www.stpaul.gov/council/2006/> . Clerks are: Mary Erickson (651-266-8565) and Carol Broermann (651-266-8643).
- Call the Offices of City Council at 651-266-8460 if you have any questions or use <http://www.stpaul.gov/council> to learn more about the City Council.

### *Minneapolis City Council*

- Minneapolis City Council meets every other Friday Morning (usually starting 9:30pm).
- Committees meet bi-weekly at various times, and much of the Council's work takes place at the committee level. You can find the schedule for the Council including committee meetings at <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/council/2007-meetings/home/20070309.asp>
- You can simply go and attend the meetings. They are also played on Minneapolis Cable Television on Channel 79. For a schedule of meeting broadcasts go to <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/cable/GMC79.asp>
- The City Council Chambers is on the third floor of the Minneapolis City Hall, Room 317, 300 5<sup>th</sup> Street. Parking can be an issue, but there is some parking under the Government Center next door. We recommend taking public transportation in terms of cost and overall ease. Many buses go by there, and the Light Rail Transit's (LRT) Government Plaza station stops right in front of City Hall. There is an underground passage way between Minneapolis City Hall and the Hennepin County Government Center.
- There is no dress code, but it is always a good idea to look presentable.
- An agenda will be given to all visitors. If you would like to get the agenda beforehand, ask for it by calling 311 (from within Minneapolis) or emailing the City Clerk at [councilcommitteecoordinators@ci.minneapolis.mn.us](mailto:councilcommitteecoordinators@ci.minneapolis.mn.us).
- Learn more about Minneapolis City Council meeting schedules agendas, minutes and standing committees on their website: <http://www.ci.minneapolis.mn.us/council/>

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