

Canberra Organic Growers Society

Annual General Meeting

27 March 2022

President's report

The 2021 year was a successful year for COGS.

The Executive saw keeping the gardens open during the COVID lockdowns as an important outlet for our gardeners during those difficult times. It was pleasing the way gardeners responded to the various requirements and restrictions that had to be put in place to keep them opened. The COVID restrictions also meant that a number of planned activities had to be cancelled and garden AGMs postponed by a month and in some cases held via Zoom.

The past year was one of the wettest on record in Canberra. While the wet and cool conditions benefited many crops, they also presented gardeners with massive weed growth that was especially challenging when combined with the restrictions caused by the COVID lockdowns. A number of gardens experienced problems of flooding and water logging and the Charnwood Garden was decimated by a hail storm. There have also been reports of greater numbers of rodents attacking crops

The year began with a successful planning day involving the Executive and Garden Convenors looking at what COGS is, what it does and where it wants to go in the future. As result of the planning day the Executive Committee has commenced a number of initiatives:

1. Unmet demand for garden plots. The Executive is actively pursuing additional land. Meetings have been held with Ministers and other members of the Legislative Assembly. It is pleasing that community gardens in general and COGS in particular are held in high regard. I am hopeful that some additional land and maybe even a new garden may eventuate. The Executive has also held discussions with developers and other private groups. There are promising indications that when a developer-built community garden in Denman Prospect is completed it will be made available to COGS to operate;
2. Garden Infrastructure. The infrastructure in all the gardens has been reviewed. The review identified gaps and set priorities for funding to bring facilities in all gardens to a similar standard. A number of projects have already been built or approved for funding including sheds and shelters at Charnwood, Erindale, O'Connor and Cook, tree trimming at a couple of gardens and new fencing at Oaks Estate. Further projects for funding are being planned by gardens and will be considered for funding in the coming year;
3. COGS Constitution. Updating the Constitution was identified during the planning day as a priority. A revised draft constitution has been prepared and circulated to members for comment and is expected to be considered for adoption during 2022;
4. Record keeping: COGS record keeping was identified as risk that needed to be addressed. A project to digitalise COGS records and enhancing its record keeping has been initiated and is already starting to pay dividends; and

5. Need for additional social media presence. An Instagram account has been established and it has attracted considerable interest including from overseas.

During the year, as opportunities arose, COGS continued to engage with the Government and MLA's and was referred to in a speech on community gardens by Andrew Braddock MLA. A submission to the Government's Food and Fibre Strategy has been prepared. COGS maintained relationships with like-minded organisations (such as Canberra City Farm and SEE Change), the University of Canberra and ANU as well as holding discussions with a number of private organisations including churches and land developers.

The Holder Garden was successful with a grant application for the upgrading of its water reticulation.

A key aim of COGS is to promote organic growing and it has continued this through its presence on social media and the quarterly magazine. Its Website, Facebook page and Instagram account are popular. The growing guide on the website is particularly popular often with more than 2000 hits per week. COGS representatives and gardens regularly featured on the ABC radio gardening program, podcasts and in the Canberra Times. The quarterly magazine is provided to all members of the Legislative Assembly.

COGS has met all its regulatory and legal requirements and is in a strong financial position with a substantial surplus. The surplus and the resulting strong financial position are in part the result of the wet weather reducing water consumption. This places COGS in a good position to fund works in gardens and to be able to contribute to the financing of any future expansion. It also provides the financial buffer for the inevitable future drought years when the water bills will be much higher.

COGS is a substantial organisation with 500 members, 12 gardens that cover an area of nearly 3 hectares, a substantial presence on social media and a quarterly magazine. It takes a lot of work to keep COGS functioning: cutting grass, fixing lawn mowers, managing communal compost, organizing working bees, writing (submissions, minutes, applications and articles), editing the magazine, developing and maintaining social media sites, plot management, paying bills, issuing invoices, attending meetings and more.

None of this just happens. Somebody has to do it.

COGS has no paid staff but is fortunate to have many volunteers that put in thousands of hours each year to keep it running. The COGS Executive has reinstated the awarding of life membership as a way of recognising this work. Congratulations to Conrad Van Hest, Narelle MacLean and Richard Horobin on being awarded life membership in recognition of their outstanding contribution to COGS over many years.

Finally, a huge thank you to the members of the Executive Committee and Convenors who put in many, many hours of their time. They are a wonderful group of people that are focused on progressing COGS and community gardening generally. Much of the work they do is unseen but nonetheless essential. Without them and the work they do COGS cannot function. It has been a pleasure and privilege to work with them over the past 12 months. Thank you.

Andy Hrast
President