Planning and holding a public meeting

What do you want to get out of the meeting?

• To have identified a need
• Get buy-in into your project, ie local interest, enthusiasm and support
• Come up with a shared vision, ie what local people want
• Identify people who want to be involved, i.e. potential volunteers for the project and also people who could sit on the core group and help steer the project
• Identify potential resources, skills, knowledge that exists within the community.
• Input and Ideas: there may be some aspects of your project you had not thought of.

Who should be invited?

• Representatives from all local groups, community council, your local county or city councillor.
• Members of the local community.
• Support organisations, ie Communities First, Groundwork, your local voluntary council ie VACS, PAVS etc.
• Potential funders? Maybe not at this stage
• Potential landowners? Maybe not at this stage

What should take place at the meeting?

• Signing in: Get people to sign in, providing their contact details.
• Introductions: This is a great opportunity to find out who everyone is and for people to meet their neighbour and other people from the community.
• An overview of your proposed project, you may want to provide an overview of the different models of community growing, their benefits i.e. health, education, social, environment etc and the different types of activities that could take place on the project, so that people are more informed. (FCFCG can assist and provide information).
• Discussion: This is often best done in small groups with some flip chart paper and ask someone from the group to scribe and then feedback. Questions you may want people to discuss could include:
  • Is this something you feel would benefit the local community?
  • What would you like the project/space to provide for the community? What would you like it to do?
  • What would your vision for this space be? (This is also an opportunity for people to get creative, so provide some coloured marker pens and people may want to design the space).
  • What is needed to help make this happen?
  • What can you do to help? Would you like to be involved?
Keep the tone positive. Do not indicate that this is already happening, but that this is the first stage, an opportunity to find out if there is local interest, find out what local people want and who would like to be involved.

If any negativity does arise, thank people for their comments and input, and try to steer it away and back towards the potential opportunities and the benefits.

**Suggested timeline for a public meeting**

5:45pm Arrive well ahead of time and set up the room with tables, flip charts, refreshments etc. Split people into groups, around tables with people they may not know.

6:45pm People start to arrive. Ensure someone is there to greet and sign them in, capturing contact details and that refreshments are available.

7:00pm Welcome and overview of the evening by one of core group/chair. Explain why you want to start a community garden.

7:15pm Inspiring talk from another community garden, giving an empowering example of what can be achieved.

7:30pm More detailed overview of proposition from core group. Enthuse people and talk from the heart!

7:40pm Group work. Ask people for their vision for their community garden. Use flip chart paper to record thoughts in notes or pictures. Ask each group to feedback to room at the end.

8:20pm Facilitate some general discussion on group proposals (take notes on these). Get a feeling of a ‘joint venture’ in the room.

8:40pm Now that you’ve got a vision, ask people what they can contribute. Circulate (or have big sign-up sheets) for people who wish to: i) join core group, ii) contribute skills. iii) make donations to get the garden started.

8:50pm Close the evening. Thank everyone for their contributions and invite to follow up event such as site visit. Arrange with core group a date for 1st meeting to progress ideas. Follow up with a press release.

**What you’ll need:**

- Flip charts/large paper for group work + pens
- Pictures of the site available (if you have one)
- Sign up sheets for: core group, skills to offer, new members, contributions
- Camera

Remember: Keep your tone of voice positive and welcoming. Acknowledge all points raised. Be an animator, help people feel the community garden is theirs to shape, not yours to dictate.