

Committee of the Whole (1) Report

DATE: Tuesday, March 02, 2021

WARD(S): ALL

**TITLE: COMMUNITY GARDEN POLICY REVISION
FILE 22.36**

FROM:

Jim Harnum, City Manager

ACTION: DECISION

Purpose

To seek approval of the City's revised Community Garden Policy (18.C.01) and amendment to the project description of Capital Project RP-6776-18 (Community Garden Program).

Report Highlights

- Revisions to the Community Garden Policy were conducted to ensure consistency of current garden operations and provide clarity to volunteer gardeners.
- Revisions are consistent with the process the Office of the City Clerk is undertaking to streamline documents by transferring corporate policies to new templates.
- The project description was updated for Capital Project RP-6776-18, allowing funds to be reallocated to the enhancement of current community gardens, rather than being restricted solely to creating new community gardens.

Recommendations

1. That the revised Community Garden Policy, appended as Attachment 1, be approved; and
2. That the project description of Capital Project RP-6776-18 be revised to allow the funds to be used for enhancement of existing community gardens.

Background

Council approved the Community Garden Policy (the 'Policy') in April 2014 with the intent to provide a framework for the establishment and management of community gardens on City-owned lands. Council in June 2018 endorsed recommended approval authorities for all existing corporate policies including the Community Garden Policy, which requires Council approval. The Policy Committee approved the revised Policy on May 21, 2020.

The City of Vaughan currently supports four community gardens on City-owned land at the following locations:

- Hope Garden at Michael Cranny House – 439 Glenkindie Avenue
- Sugarbush Heritage Park Allotment Garden – 91 Thornhill Woods Drive
- Growing to Give Garden at Fire Station 7-1 – 835 Clark Avenue
- City Hall Demonstration Garden – 2141 Major Mackenzie Drive

Community gardens positively contribute to environmental, social, and economic sustainability and overall community development. These gardens offer an all-ages gathering place where City of Vaughan residents and employees of Vaughan-based businesses can meet to grow and care for fruits, vegetables, herbs, flowers, native plants, and ornamentals.

City Council in January 2018, approved a capital project with a budget of \$50,000 for the establishment of two additional community gardens, funded from the Capital from Taxation Reserve. Two new gardens were recommended to be added, one in Ward 2 and one in Ward 3, with the result of having at least one community garden in each ward. There is approximately \$39,000 remaining in the capital project after completing works at Vellore Heritage Square (see Analysis and Options section for more details). It is recommended in this report to re-purpose this capital project to allow for improvements to existing community gardens and also allow for the planting of pollinator gardens.

Community gardens on City-owned land build community cohesion

The City's community gardens provide an opportunity to showcase examples of effective and sustainable gardens, encourage citizens to get outside and be active, promote intergenerational and multicultural relationships and build community cohesion. This program is promoted through the Environmental Sustainability website and the Corporate and Strategic Communications department.

The City currently oversees three gardens that are managed collectively by a group of gardeners and one allotment garden where designated plots are made available for individual or organizational use.

The community gardens are planted, maintained, and supported by groups of dedicated volunteer gardeners, which are led by a Community Garden Coordinator(s). The York Region Food Network (YRFN) acts as the Community Garden Coordinator at the City Hall Demonstration Garden and Growing to Give Garden. The YRFN is a non-profit organization that operates programs, raises awareness, and promotes policy changes for increased access to affordable and nutritious food produced within a sustainable food system. The YRFN engages school groups and community members in nutritional education and environmental stewardship through free educational workshops and hands-on activities held at both gardens.

Human Endeavour acts as the Community Garden Coordinator for the Hope Garden. Human Endeavour is a non-profit organization that provides solutions to social challenges and improves the socio-economic and living conditions of the community. Human Endeavour utilizes the garden for events, weekly yoga or meditation practice and a meeting place for group walks.

The Sugarbush Heritage Park Allotment Garden is currently the only community garden to be managed in an allotment style, with a volunteer resident who acts as the Community Garden Coordinator.

Previous Reports/Authority

Previous reports considered by City Council regarding the Community Garden Program and Policy can be found at the following links:

[Special Council Meeting Extract – January 30, 2018](#) – At a special Council meeting in January 2018, a capital project with a \$50,000 budget for the establishment of two additional community gardens was approved.

[Council Meeting Extract – April 21, 2015](#) – Council in April 2015 adopted a recommendation to execute an Agreement with Seeds for Change and York Region Food Network to undertake a community garden project at Vaughan City Hall.

[Council Meeting Extract – April 8, 2014](#) – The preliminary (and current) Community Garden Policy was adopted by Council in April 2014.

Analysis and Options

The Community Garden Policy revision aligns with the Office of the City Clerk's policy review process and Green Directions Vaughan 2019

The City's Policy Committee in 2018, undertook an extensive review of all Corporate policies to make recommendations for repeal, and to assign an approval authority for those policies not for repeal. An additional step in the review process requires that all policies, whether existing or new, be transferred to new templates.

Council on December 17, 2019 adopted Action 4.3.3 in Green Directions Vaughan 2019, to identify the establishment of more community gardens and the revision of the Community Garden Policy.

The Community Garden Policy has been updated to ensure consistency of current garden and City operations

Proposed updates made to the Policy are minor but required to ensure consistency of current garden operations and provide clarity for gardeners include the following:

- Making the Policy and all Appendices more accessible, easier to read and understand. The Policy is organized with headers within the new template.
- Encouraging the acknowledgment of Indigenous traditional and treaty land rights within Vaughan through plantings, education, and partnerships.
- Identifying that other public lands may be utilized for community gardens, provided that the City has entered into an agreement with the property owner(s) to utilize a parcel for a community garden.
- Clearly defining scenarios where an approved organization may enter into an agreement with the City for the donation/distribution of food.
- Identifying that amendments can be made to the Appendices by staff without Council approval. This allows for a change in operational needs, including the term of the License Agreement, length of garden season and City contact person.
- Allowing for the ability to charge a structured fee per season that considers equitable access and opportunity for all community members for the use of a garden plot in an allotment community garden. Funds collected will be designated for maintenance and improvement costs associated with the community garden program.

Further proposed amendments made to the Appendices include the following:

- The Gardener License Agreement (Attachment 2 and 3 - Appendix 1a and 1b) has been divided into two separate License Agreements, one for collective community gardens and the other for allotment community gardens with additions made this year for COVID-19 pandemic protocol.
- The Memorandum of Understanding (Attachment 4 - Appendix 2) between the City and the Community Garden Coordinator is updated to include an indemnity clause and a terms of use section.
- The Release of Liability, Waiver of Claims, Assumption of Risks, and Indemnity Agreement (Attachment 5 - Appendix 3) is revised to accommodate for risks identified during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Funds in the capital project RP-6778-18 could more effectively be used for improvements to existing gardens

Since 2018, capital project RP-6776-18 has been utilized to plan a community garden at Vellore Heritage Square in Ward 3. In 2019, the water source was installed, and a pollinator garden was planted. The community garden has been put on hold as design and construction for the new Firehall 7-12 is underway at the site.

Fred Armstrong Park was identified as a potential community garden location in Ward 2. However, through community consultation, it was determined that there was a lack of interest from the community to manage the garden. As a result, a suitable location for a community garden in Ward 2 has yet to be identified. Staff are further investigating Doctors Mclean District Park as another potential location. This park is situated on land owned by Toronto and Region Conservation Authority; thus, an agreement is required to utilize a portion of the park for a City-administered community garden.

Staff recommend that the remaining funds in Capital Project RP-6776-18 (approximately \$39,000) could more effectively be utilized for enhancement of existing gardens. Improving the existing gardens as professional spaces with basic amenities, such as fencing, storage and accessible and in-ground garden beds, is preferred, prior to establishing new gardens. The remaining funds could be used for the following:

- Making improvements at Sugarbush Garden to increase plot size, add more plots and improve soil condition.
- Installing features at the City Hall Demonstration Garden, such as a low impact development entrance feature, accessible pathways, shade structures, seating, and a children's zone.
- Adding native pollinator gardens to previously established sites, where feasible.

Recommendation for further risk analysis

A recommendation to further reduce the risk to the City is to develop a separate agreement for approved community garden groups/organizations that wish to donate or distribute a portion of the harvest from the community gardens to local food banks or other individuals or community members. This new agreement is currently not included in the Policy. It will be created with input from the City's Legal Services department and Risk Management team.

Financial Impact

The Policy states that all expenses associated with sustained operation and maintenance is the responsibility of the gardeners. However, it also identifies that the City may provide a fund for start-up costs and provide support for ongoing maintenance and operations, as needed. Aside from Capital Project RP-6776-18, there is no other account (operating or capital) dedicated to the ongoing operational, educational or maintenance costs associated with the community gardens.

The Parks, Forestry and Horticulture Operations department provides in-kind services for opening and closing operations (tilling and site preparation) and seasonal grass cutting. The cost of turning water on and off is paid for by Facility Management and all other administration is conducted in-kind by the Policy Planning and Environmental Sustainability department. Other garden operating costs, such as installing a fence or proper signage, is paid for when funds become available in existing operating budgets or by seeking eligible grant funding.

As the community garden program evolves and grows, increased staffing resources may need to be considered and evaluated based on program size and success. Based on staff experience, the start-up cost of one community garden can range from \$18,000 to \$40,000. The costs cover installing basic amenities such as fencing, a storage shed and a source of potable water, signage, consultation with community members, soil tests and preparing a pollinator garden. The overall suitability of a site is critical to consider, as the length and type of fence required and location of the garden relative to an existing water source can result in varying start-up costs. These minimal requirements must be taken into consideration when establishing community gardens.

Annual operating costs for the City's existing four community gardens can range up to \$8,000 to cover turning the water source on and off, purchasing supplies, installing signage, programming for educational workshops and facilitation by the City's non-profit partners to manage the gardens. Environmental Sustainability staff

are also exploring fee structures to the allotment community gardens that can offset some of the maintenance costs associated with the City's community gardens. City staff will explore including a new fee for the Community Garden program as part of the next By-law update.

Broader Regional Impacts/Considerations

Many municipalities in York Region have community garden programs, including City of Markham, City of Richmond Hill, Township of King, and the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville. The YRFN operates gardens in the Towns of Newmarket and Aurora.

The Community Garden Program aligns with York Region's Agriculture and Agri-Food Strategy, as it supports the provision of community gardens and/or urban agriculture projects.

Conclusion

The revised Community Garden Policy will allow for more efficient administration and management of the City's community gardens. The revised Policy reflects current operations and provides clarity for gardeners on code of conduct.

Updating the project description of Capital Project RP-6776-18 allows for funds to be utilized for enhancement of existing gardens and will ensure each garden location is a more structured space that meets the basic needs of the gardeners.

For more information, please contact: Monica Choy (for Alanna MacKenzie), Sustainability Coordinator, ext. 8941

Attachments

1. Attachment 1 - Community Garden Policy 18.C.01
2. Attachment 2 - Appendix 1a Community Gardens Allotment License Agreement
3. Attachment 3 - Appendix 1b Community Gardens Collective License Agreement
4. Attachment 4 - Appendix 2 Community Garden Coordinator Memorandum of Understanding
5. Attachment 5 - Appendix 3 Waiver of Liability

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Reviewed by

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Jim Harnum, City Manager