

REPORT #: PDS 2013 48
DATE: 15 Oct 2013
TO: Deputy Mayor and Members of Committee of the Whole
SUBJECT: **Community Gardens**
PREPARED BY: Tami Kitay, Senior Planner

1. RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Council receive report number PDS 2013 48 entitled “Community Gardens” as information and provide direction to staff, if appropriate, on next steps.

2. PREAMBLE:

Following an inquiry from a resident, Council has requested that staff prepare an information report on community gardens within the Town. The purpose of this report to advise Council about what community gardens are, what they can accomplish, and the challenges of implementation for the municipality.

3. BASIC DATA PERTAINING TO THE MATTER:

The Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury prides itself on the strength of its agricultural community and the quality of the produce grown within its borders. Organized growth has seen a dramatic increase in development within the Bradford urban boundary with a defined edge between the urban and agricultural landscapes. With the movement towards more compact and efficient built form within the Bradford urban area, private backyards are being utilized as an extension of living space for recreational uses and the family vegetable garden is becoming less of a priority.

What are community gardens?

A *community garden* (sometimes referred to as a communal garden) is a single piece of land gardened collectively by a group of people. The resulting produce and/or plant materials are distributed amongst the volunteers or donated to specific causes (food banks, community meal organizations, crisis care facilities, etc.)

Allotment gardens (also referred to as community gardens) are lands separated into plots that are assigned to individuals or families and cultivated individually. The resulting produce and/or plant products are owned by the individual gardeners of the plots.

The type of community garden to be provided is a consideration that should be based on community interest and need. For example, is a communal garden tended by a dedicated group of volunteers to support the local food bank the key driving force behind the initiative? Or, would an allotment garden with individual plots for families to teach children about produce and the chain of events from seed-to-product-to-plate be a more popular and supported program? The type of community garden initiative also depends greatly on the volunteer capacity of participants.

For the purposes of this report, the term *community garden* encompasses both meanings.

Why have a community garden?

Community gardens provide health, economic, educational, social, and environmental benefits to participants and the community at large. They provide a place to connect people with similar interests in nature and can be an important source of low-cost food for those without. Community gardens can also help promote food security for participants.

What are other municipalities doing?

City of Vaughan

The City of Vaughan partnered with Seeds for Change and the York Region Food Network on a 2 year community garden pilot project at one of the city's Fire and Rescue Service Stations. Seeds for Change are a grassroots community organization that encourages healthier communities through school and community gardens. The York Region Food Network seeks to promote food security and access to healthy and sustainable food for residents through numerous community initiatives. Gardens are encouraged to donate a portion of their cultivation to a community agency or family in need. The program is currently in the first year of a two year pilot project overseen by staff in their Environmental Sustainability Office and Parks and Forestry Department. A community garden policy is forthcoming. The municipality annually rototills the soil and provides a source for water.

Town of Richmond Hill

The Town of Richmond Hill has a community allotment garden located at a public park. Plots are leased on a seasonal and annual basis to individuals for non-commercial gardening (food and other plants). The municipality provides several water tanks for gardeners to use, however, users must supply their own gardening tools. Seasonal leases range from \$25.24 to \$60.09.

City of Barrie

The City of Barrie has a Community Garden Policy and two locations in municipal parks, created through a partnership with Living Green – Environmental Action Barrie. The City does not provide a water source. A rental contract is required and a fee of either \$20, \$40, or \$50 (depending on plot size) must be submitted. The City also advises gardens to provide their own controls such as raised beds and chicken wire fencing to prevent loss of produce to wildlife.

Town of Aurora

The Town of Aurora in partnership with the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and Windfall Ecology Centre has created a new community garden in Sheppard's Bush Conservation Area. The allotment style garden is kept pesticide free. The municipality has had community gardens since 1996 at several different locations. The older community gardens are operated in conjunction with the York Region Food Network free of charge. Growers are encouraged to donate some of their produce to local food banks.

City of Markham

The City of Markham has recently launched two community garden pilot projects – one communal garden and one allotment garden. The projects are to be used as a basis to establish a community garden manual and a community garden guiding principles policy. The municipality has suggested a minimum of 1 acre of land be used on City owned land. The City operates the annual registration process, provides plots, water, compost, and perimeter maintenance.

Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury

The Danube Seniors Centre has a vegetable garden that is maintained by the users of the facility.

Holy Trinity Secondary School has a community garden that is maintained by students of the school and used for educational purposes.

Are there private community gardens?

St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Richmond Hill offers a community garden plot through a seasonal lease. Plots are 20' by 20' and the lease is \$40 pre season. A deposit is also required for a key and access card. Water taps are provided as are some small gardening tools.

Karma Project, a non-profit organization, provides plots for rent at the Ecology Garden in Penetanguishene and the produce is donated to La Maison Rosewood Shelter.

CONSIDERATIONS:

The type of community garden and Council's intent of their use should also be considered in the context of the following:

Demand

Before Council implements a community garden policy and provides financial or material support for such an initiative, short term and long term support should be assessed to determine if volunteer and participatory capacity exists to support a community garden initiative. This assessment will also provide some insight into the type of community garden initiative that would be best suited to the community (communal or allotment) depending on the demand for such a facility and the availability of a community partner for program maintenance.

Potential Locations

Planning staff have met with Parks and Facilities staff to discuss suitable municipally-owned locations within the Town. A preliminary review of park and facility sites has not resulted in any identified lands that could support a community garden at this time or in the near future. Leisure staff have advised that the Town is deficient in parkland and that existing parks are heavily programmed. Staff were unable to locate suitable space for a community garden that would not be impacted by balls, kids, vegetation, or grading challenges. Leisure staff advised that should it be Council's direction, a community garden can be incorporated into the design of the future Henderson Park which would also reflect the theme of the new park's legacy.

Leisure staff suggested that in the shorter term, locations could be assessed within municipally owned hydro easements or at private community properties such as churches, schools, or the Scanlon Creek Conservation Area. Partnerships and agreements with outside agencies would be necessary and require further review.

Community gardens should be accessible to the people who would be using them – ideally within the built up Bradford urban area. At this time, there does not appear to be any suitable municipally owned locations within the Bradford settlement boundaries.

Insurance

If the Town partners with a community organization to create a community garden on private property, the Town should investigate to ensure that the municipality's liability policy will cover the Town's interests in the event of an unfortunate incident.

Water Provisions

Some municipalities provide water taps to their community gardens where others provide rain barrels or nothing at all. Depending on the location of a potential community garden, municipal water sources may or may not be available. Planning staff have met with Engineering staff who advised that they are currently preparing a Water Efficiency Conservation Policy. They suggest the provision of rain barrels

would help meet the intent of the policy as opposed to sprinkler irrigation systems and/or taps. The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority also provides educational low-water gardening workshop seminars that could be helpful, if a community garden initiative is implemented.

Competition

Local farmers markets sometimes take issue with community gardens as competition and having unfair market advantage. They argue that public lands should not be used by individuals to produce product for sale. Therefore, should Council decide to move forward with a community garden initiative, the resulting policy should investigate and regulate the use of product cultivated from the community garden for personal or charitable use only.

Facilities

The following cost estimates have been provided by the Leisure Services Department and are provided for Council's general information:

- 4' chain link fencing: approximately \$15-\$20 per linear foot
- Load of loam: approximately \$385
- Rain barrels: \$125 each
- Portable toilet rental: \$100/month

NEXT STEPS:

Should Council determine that there is sufficient and adequate community interest and demand in creating and maintaining a community garden, a review of best practices at other municipalities reveals the following actions to be undertaken:

- A review of municipal by-laws, policies, and regulations to ensure conformity and support for the establishment of community gardens, particularly at an intended location.
- A thorough assessment of potential locations, including private community-oriented properties, and identification of requirements (such as compliance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, access easements, insurance, minimum sizing, access, etc.)
- The creation of a Community Gardens policy.
- The provision of community consultation, outreach, and education sessions.
- Finding a community partner who has the ability to contribute to the creation, administration, and on-going development of the community garden and to organize any charitable outreach, if applicable.

4. EFFECT ON TOWN FINANCES:

4.1 CURRENT YEAR:

Not applicable.

4.2 FUTURE YEARS:

Should Council move forward with a community garden initiative, the budget should be modified to reflect the type of community garden initiative and its design, implementation, and annual maintenance requirements.

5. ATTACHMENTS:

None.

6. APPROVALS:

Approved By:

Geoff McKnight, Director of Planning &
Development Services
Ian Goodfellow, Director of Finance/Treasurer
Jay Currier, Town Manager

Status:

Approved - 03 Oct 2013
Approved - 04 Oct 2013
Approved - 08 Oct 2013