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Date November 07, 2023 **Report No.** 2023-565
To Chair and Members
Committee of the Whole – Operations
From Inderjit Hans, P. Eng., PMP
Commissioner, Public Works Commission

1.0 Type of Report

Consent Item
Item For Consideration

2.0 Topic Community Gardens Corporate Policy Update [Financial Impact: \$25,000 in 2024]

3.0 Recommendation

- A. THAT Report No. 2023-565 Community Gardens Corporate Policy Update BE RECEIVED; and
- B. THAT the necessary By-law to amend By-law 70-2010, Being a By-law to adopt various policies of the City of Brantford and to create a Corporate Policy Manual, by repealing and replacing PUBLIC WORKS-028 (Community Gardens Corporate Policy) as attached as Appendix “A” BE PRESENTED to Council for adoption; and
- C. THAT staff BE DIRECTED to include the estimated costs of \$25,000 for water servicing for a downtown central community garden in the 2024 budget and that these costs BE FUNDED from the Council Priorities Reserve RF0558.

4.0 Executive Summary

The objective of this report is to provide the background, jurisdictional best practices, and recommendations for updating the City's Community Gardens Policy, in response to Council Resolution 7.1 from the Committee of the Whole meeting on June 6, 2023. Staff were directed to investigate appropriate locations for Community Gardens in all Wards and report back on potential locations including an inventory on current locations, water service availability, other factors/constraints for future locations, and Community Garden Policy update recommendations (attached as Appendix A: PUBLIC WORKS-028 Community Gardens Policy).

Through the proposed updates to the Community Gardens Policy, the City of Brantford will join a growing number of municipalities that employ the most up-to-date best practices for operating and managing their community gardens. The updated Community Gardens Policy will provide guidance on the uptake of new approaches to the governance and administration of local community gardens, such as more detailed evaluation criteria to determine the suitability of potential garden sites. Additionally, the updated Community Gardens Policy will highlight the importance of annual data collection through surveys to inform future program development and to highlight program success metrics/stories.

The Community Gardens Policy has been updated to outline more specific guidelines and responsibilities for involved stakeholders. These updated and enhanced guidelines and responsibilities were developed through engagement with Equal Grounds Community Gardens (EGCG) to ensure the updated policy reflects current volunteer, infrastructure, funding, and resource capacities.

5.0 Purpose and Overview

This Report provides recommendations for updating the existing Community Gardens Policy (Appendix B: PARKS and RECREATION-018 Community Gardens Policy) as well as information regarding the guidelines for evaluating locations for community gardens. Additionally, this report includes an inventory on current community garden locations and water service availability. This report outlines how updating the Community Gardens Policy is required to increase the coordination between the City and involved stakeholders to ensure successful delivery of the program.

6.0 Background

On April 13, 2015, City Council approved [Report No. CD2015-094 Community Gardens Policy and Procedures](#), inclusive of the following recommendations:

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- D. THAT Staff RECEIVE site applications from interested community groups to operate new Community Gardens through license agreement(s) by May 15, 2015 for the 2015 planting season; and
 - E. THAT the capital funding for the installation of up to four (4) Community Gardens in the amount of \$80,000 BE APPROVED with the funding to come from the Council Priorities Fund (RF-0558) and that it be placed in a Community Garden Reserve Account; and
 - F. THAT based on Community demand and uptake Staff BE DIRECTED to include future Community Garden Projects in the Capital Budget and Forecast for Council consideration to reflect requests received for new gardens; and
 - G. THAT the General Manger of Community Services BE AUTHORIZED to approve a Community Garden License Agreement once finalized by City Legal Services.

The Community Gardens Program was created in response to a Resolution of City Council at its meeting held March 23, 2015 to create capacity for third party stakeholder groups to launch, operate, and maintain community gardens in neighbourhoods throughout Brantford. Since its approval in 2015, the Community Gardens Policy and Program has been administered by the Community Gardens Committee, comprised of staff representatives from the Parks and Recreation Department and members of City Council.

In June of 2019, volunteers from the Downtown Community Neighbourhood Association (DCNA) partnered with Equal Grounds Community Gardens (EGCG) volunteers, as well as students from Central Public School to install a community garden on the school grounds. When the school expanded in 2020, the community garden had to be removed. At the Committee of the Whole – Operations meeting held on June 6, 2023, City Council considered Resolution 7.1 titled *Central Park Community Garden Water Service* whereby the DCNA was looking to re-establish a community garden in their neighbourhood since a recent playground upgrade has opened up a space nearby. Staff were directed to investigate appropriate locations for Community Gardens in all Wards and report back on potential locations including in the report an inventory on current locations, water service availability, other factors/constraints for future locations, and Community Garden Policy update recommendations.

This report provides City Council with the analysis of the community garden program as well as recommendations for updates to the Community Gardens Policy, potential locations for future gardens in each ward, and information about the request for water service by the DCNA.

7.0 Corporate Policy Context

- 2023-2026 City of Brantford Council Priorities:
 - Strategic Theme 10: Build a greener Brantford.
 - Strategic Theme 6: Effectively and consistently engage with the community.
- Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2018) Recommendation 66: Continue to work with community groups to plan for and establish community gardens and food forests including locations within existing parks and as part of new and existing parks development and explore related partnership and fundraising opportunities.
- City of Brantford Official Plan (2023) Section 3.5 Q: The City will support and promote urban agricultural activities on public lands, including community gardens, food cooperatives and local food sourcing programs, where appropriate, and in accordance with the applicable policies of this plan.

8.0 Input From Other Sources

- City of Brantford staff from the following departments:
 - Parks and Recreation Department
 - Business Support & Sustainability Department
 - Legal and Real Estate Services Department
- External stakeholders including:
 - Equal Grounds Community Gardens (EGCG)

9.0 Analysis

9.1 Benefits of Community Gardens

A community garden is a place where individuals/groups can meet to grow and care for a variety of plants, including, fruits, vegetables, herbs, flowers, native and/or ornamental plants for communal use and enjoyment. There are numerous benefits to community gardens, these include:

- Promote the production of local, healthy and fresh food
- Enhance local food security

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- Provide gardening and other environmental education activities to encourage the involvement of schools, youth groups and seniors in gardening activities
 - Supports donations of food to local food distribution organizations, food pantries, food banks and meal programs

Providing residents a location to participate in a community garden, supports the development of new skills such as growing food they can eat and establishing community connections. The social aspect of community gardens is often cited as one of the key positive benefits of these spaces. Community garden resources such as tools, hoses, compost areas, and wheelbarrows are often communally shared and gardeners interact with one another and develop friendships. Additionally, community gardens contribute towards creating more inclusive neighbourhoods by providing a chance for people to meet and work together.

9.2 Inventory on current Community Garden Locations

Currently, the Parks and Recreation Department administers and coordinates the Community Gardens Program, operating May 1st through October 1st at 11 park locations throughout the City. Figure 1 provides a map of the community garden locations and Table 1 is a list of the locations including details about the number of plant beds.

Figure 1: Locations of Community Gardens City of Brantford Parks

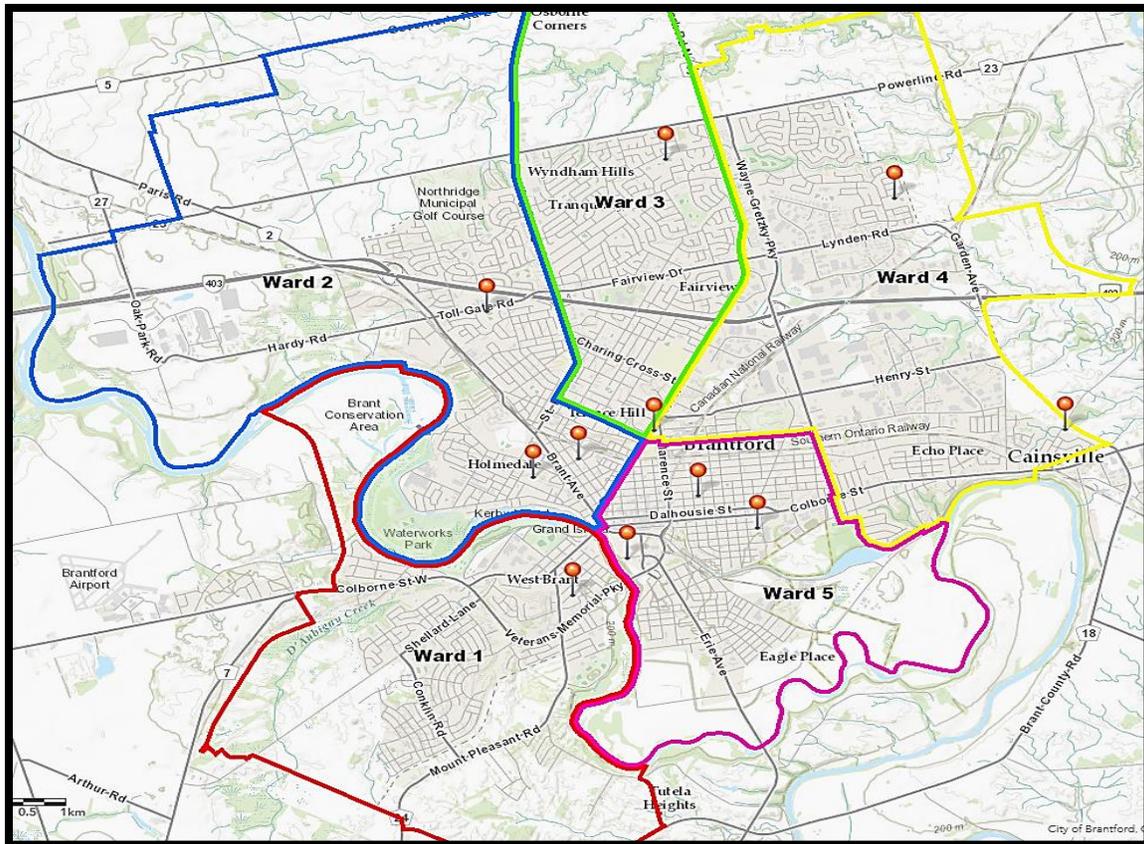


Table 1 - List of the 11 Community Gardens Across the City of Brantford

Facility	Location	Condition	Details
CG-1	Lynden Hills Park	Good	(10) 4x8 raised beds, (5) 4x4 raised beds, 2 composters
CG-2	Iroquois Park	N/A	(3) 4x8 raised beds, (2) rain barrels, (1) picnic bench
CG-3	Cedarland Park	Good	(8) 4x8 raised beds, (1) 8x10 wooden shed, (2) rain barrels, (1) composter, (1) butterfly garden
CG-4	Charlie Ward Park	Good	(3) 4x8 raised beds, (1) rain barrel, (1) composter, (1) mulched area
CG-5	Greenwood Park	Good	(4) 4x8 raised beds, (1) 8x10 wooden shed, (2) rain barrels, (1) composter, (1) picnic table
CG-6	Earl Haig Park	N/A	(24) 4x8 raised beds, (10) rain barrels, (4) benches
CG-7	Spring St. - Buck Park	Good	(5) 4x8 raised beds, (2) rain barrels, (1) composter, (1)

			picnic table, mulched area
CG-8	Johnson Park	Good	(5) 4x8 raised garden beds, (1) picnic table, (1) rain barrel
CG-9	Spring Gardens Park	Good	(5) 4x8 raised garden beds, (3) rain barrels, (1) composter, (1) picnic bench
CG-10	Princess Anne Park	Fair	(3) 4x8 raised garden beds, (2) rain barrels, (1) picnic table
CG-11	Robert Moore Park	Good	(8) 4x8 raised garden beds, (4) rain barrels, (2) composters, (1) picnic bench

Across the City of Brantford, there are 99 garden beds in 11 community garden park sites. Aside from parks, there are 5 community gardens located on public properties across the City, including the Brantford Library (St. Paul), Fire Station, Marlene Ave Apartments, Myrtleville House Museum, and the Police Station. EGCG plays a significant role in supporting the operational maintenance of these gardens, engaging with community members, and liaising with City staff. The City and Equal Grounds Community Gardens currently support and maintain a total of 11 active community gardens found in city parks. Other groups who maintain/manage the other 5 community garden locations are the Brantford Mosque, EarlyON, Lansdowne Children’s Centre, Salvation Army, and Woodview Mental Health and Autism Services.

9.3 Current Community Gardens Application Process

As per the existing Community Gardens Policy, interested persons are required to submit an application to create a new Community Garden to the City by April 1st the year for which the application applies. All applicants must be a legal entity in its own right and not an unincorporated association or other form of informal organization. In the context of the Community Gardens Policy, a “legal entity” means “an individual, company, or organization that has legal rights and obligations.” Upon receipt of new Community Garden applications, the Community Gardens Committee initiates a consultation and notification process with the neighbours near the potential site and evaluates the proposed site on a case-by-case basis to ensure the proposed site is:

- Consistent with the City’s overall zoning and development plan for the land
- Suitable for successful gardening with appropriate sun exposure, soil quality and drainage (site and soil testing may be required prior to garden development)

- Appropriate for the intended surrounding community
- In accordance with the principles of universal accessibility design under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (“AODA”)
- In close proximity to urban neighborhoods and preferably in areas of high population density

Upon review by the Community Gardens Committee, a City Representative notifies the applicant of the acceptance or rejection of the application. If an application is accepted, the City Representative works with the applicant to develop a detailed site plan outlining the proposed layout of the specific community garden. Upon approval of the site plan, the applicant is provided a License Agreement (for one year) which upon signing the applicant is permitted use the Community Garden for the time period specified in the Agreement. The management of volunteers and/or day-to-day operations of the community garden site it is the responsibility of the community garden groups/“champions” (e.g., Equal Grounds Community Gardens, EarlyON, etc.). Therefore, costs associated with operational maintenance (such as equipment, soil, etc.) are the responsibility of community garden groups. An application is required to be filled out by applicants for each site to assess the merits of the application for each individual site. Once a site has been approved by the Committee, subsequent renewals are permitted without an application as the site was previously approved.

9.4 Jurisdictional Scan

To understand how other municipalities around Ontario administer their Community Garden Programs, staff conducted a municipal scan as detailed below. Table 2 provides an overview of the City of Brantford’s comparable municipalities and their approaches to operating and managing their community garden programs as well as the total number of community garden sites.

Table 2 – Description of Community Garden Processes from Comparable Municipalities

City	Gardens	Formal Policy and Criteria	Garden Management	Data Collection	Operational Budget Reported
Barrie	6	Yes	City staff	Yes	*
Brant	3	No	City staff	Yes	*
Burlington	5	No	City staff	Yes	\$30,000 per year
Chatham-Kent	6	Yes	External Group	No	*

Cambridge	4	No	City staff	Yes	\$23,000 per year
Guelph	45	No	City staff	No	*
Hamilton	22	Yes	City staff	Yes	\$20,000 per year
Kingston	35	Yes	City staff	Yes	*
London	21	No	City staff	No	\$38,000 per year
Niagara	12	Yes	City staff	Yes	\$35,000 per year
Oakville	4	No	City staff	No	*
Peterborough	7	Yes	External Group	Yes	\$16,500 per year
Waterloo	6	Yes	City staff	Yes	*
Windsor	8	Yes	City staff	Yes	*
Brantford	12	Yes	City staff	No	\$25,000 per year

*Could not find the statistic or the City has no operational budget in place

From the outlined jurisdictional scan and associated data, we can summarize the following:

- More than half (57.14%) of Brantford’s comparable municipalities have a formal community gardens policy as well as established site selection criteria.
- A majority (85.71%) of Brantford’s comparable municipalities have City staff managing and informing the final decisions regarding all community garden matters.
- A large percent (71.42%) of Brantford’s comparable municipalities implement community garden data collection tools (e.g., surveys, community engagement forums, etc.) to highlight community garden successes, goals, and stories happening in the community.
- Based on Brantford’s comparable municipalities and available data, the average operational budget for community gardens is \$27,083.33.

From the outlined summary, it is clear that the City of Brantford is staying up to date with the best practices regarding the total number of community garden sites, having a formal policy and established criteria, and how community gardens are managed. Areas of recommendation are to establish an annual data collection

survey for community garden groups and volunteers. Additionally, it is recommended to revise the existing Community Gardens Policy to reflect up to date site criteria and as well as how and who directly informs all related community garden matters.

9.5 Recommended Amendments to Community Gardens Policy

Based on the current practices of comparable municipalities, the following sections summarize the recommended amendments to the existing Community Gardens Policy. An updated Policy including these amendments is attached as Appendix A: PUBLIC WORKS-028 Community Gardens Policy. In addition to the sections that follow, the updates to the policy include a new deadline for applications of March 1 of the same year to provide additional time for reviews by City staff and consultation activities to occur and an extension of the growing season to October 31. The updated Community Garden Application Form is attached as Appendix C.

9.5.1 Committee

It is recommended that the Community Gardens Committee be disbanded. Currently, the Community Gardens Committee has responsibility for making decisions regarding new applications for garden sites. The Committee currently has a former Council member who is no longer on City Council sitting on the Committee. Best practices from a majority of municipal comparators have designated city staff exclusively managing their community gardens and decision making. The amended Community Gardens Policy will outline that City staff are to make the final decision regarding all community garden decision making matters (e.g., community garden applications, etc.) based on the approved site selection criteria that has been developed in consultation with EGCG. In addition, staff will continue to consult with relevant community partners including EGCG, Ward Councillors, and community members where appropriate to inform decisions when needed.

9.5.2 Site Selection Criteria

It is recommended that the site selection criteria for community gardens be updated and formalized. Currently, the City's evaluation criteria for community garden site selection includes vague language with no quantifiable metrics in place. The amended Community Gardens Policy will outline quantifiable and more detailed criteria to better determine the

suitability of a proposed community garden site. The full site selection criteria can be found in the Appendix C: Community Garden Supplementary Documents. This updated criteria will include more transparent language and metrics in place to assist community members and City staff when planning future community garden sites/locations.

Additionally, staff have reviewed existing park spaces in the City and have compared the locations against the proposed site selection criteria and whether water service (e.g., rain barrels, water trucks, water servicing infrastructure) is available. In section 9.6, examples of eligible parks that would meet the site selection criteria are listed as well as water service that is available. It should be noted that just because the sites passed the initial site selection criteria and have a source of available water service, does not mean they are suitable locations and that determination would require a fulsome review onsite as well as capacity of volunteer groups. Not all sites have access to water servicing infrastructure but, all sites have access to water being serviceable through rain barrels and/or water trucks.

9.5.3 Performance Measurements

It is recommended that an annual 'End of Year Harvest Survey' is implemented for the updated Community Garden Program to support the evaluation and collection of metrics. Currently, the City provides no opportunities for community gardeners and/or EGCG to provide annual community garden produce reports. From this, the City is missing the opportunity to build data related history with garden locations, inform future community garden developments/trends, and highlight community garden success/weaknesses. A majority of comparable municipalities are shown to utilize community garden data collection done through surveys, interviews, and/or community engagement. The amended Community Gardens Policy will note how annual 'End of Year Harvest Surveys' are to be facilitated to community garden groups and community garden volunteers by early September of each year, to then be completed by end of October. Garden groups and volunteers will be encouraged to complete the survey by highlighting community garden successes, goals, and stories happening in the community. The survey is attached as Appendix C: Community Garden Supplementary Documents.

9.6 Potential Future Community Garden Locations

Based on the site selection criteria as well as available water servicing infrastructure, the following locations in each ward would be suitable for a community garden:

Ward 1 - Anderson Road Park and Donegal Park

Ward 2 – Holmedale Park and Mayfair Park

Ward 3 - Burnley Park and Tranquility Park

Ward 4 - Bridle Path Park and Echo Park

Ward 5 - Bellview Park and Sheri-Mar Park

It should be noted that while these locations pass the initial site selection criteria as well as available water servicing infrastructure, they should be subject to a fulsome review onsite by Parks and Recreation staff and would require an application to be submitted by an eligible applicant.

9.7 Funding for Downtown Central Community Garden Water Service

During a Committee of the Whole - Operations meeting on June 6, 2023, the following Resolution was presented regarding the Downtown Central Community Garden Water Service;

A. THAT following approval from the Community Garden Committee, City Staff BE DIRECTED to construct a park service complete with meter chamber and parks service box; and

B. THAT City Staff BE DIRECTED to engage and retain appropriate professional Contractor and to fund these costs, estimated to be \$25,000, from the Council Priorities Reserve RF0558.

During the meeting, the Resolution was referred to a future Council meeting where staff would provide further details about the Community Garden Program in general and options to fund the water service. As the time period to install a water service for the 2023 growing season has passed, staff recommend referring the \$25,000 cost to the 2024 Estimates Committee to be considered in the budget deliberations and allow time for construction for the 2024 growing season.

10.0 Financial Implications

There is \$25,000 in the Parks Operating budget for the administration of the Community Gardens Program. If this Report is approved, the \$25,000 cost for the water service at the Downtown Central Community Garden will be included

in the 2024 budget and considered at the Estimates Committee, funded from the Council Priorities Reserve RF0558.

11.0 Climate and Environmental Implications

Community gardens are a form of green infrastructure and provide positive impacts to climate change and the environment. Community gardens reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by carbon sequestration with urban plants and trees and therefore help to reduce urban heat islands by the natural cooling of air and surfaces. Additionally, having community gardens and growing food locally further reduces GHG emissions by shortening food supply chains and reducing food transportation.

Community gardens also enhance the local environment by providing ecosystem services such as cleaning the air, filtering water, protecting bee populations, and increasing biodiversity. Maintaining and expanding community gardens also enhances environmental awareness among residents through hands-on learning. By growing food locally, residents are able to learn about food security and sustainability and reducing their carbon footprints.

12.0 Conclusion

Community gardens provide a range of mental, physical, and social health benefits, but also to positively impact the environment. Amending the current Community Gardens Policy is necessary to maximize the outlined benefits for community members. From these proposed policy amendments, the goal is to support a transparent understanding from City staff, the EGCG, and community members for how Community Gardens are operated and maintained. The new Community Gardens Policy will support the continuation of working with stakeholders through delivering the program needs to support green and food security initiatives for year to come.



Inderjit Hans, P. Eng., PMP
Commissioner, Public Works Commission

Prepared By:

Rick Cox, Director of Parks and Facilities Services

Michael Westwood, Manager of Cemeteries, Forestry, and Horticulture

Gagan Batra, Manager of Business Support and Sustainability

Josh Llewellyn, Data and Program Coordinator

Attachments (if applicable)

Appendix A: PUBLIC WORKS-028 Community Gardens Policy (revised policy)

Appendix B: PARKS and RECREATION-018 Community Gardens Policy (previous policy)

Appendix C: Community Garden Supplementary Documents

Copy to:

In adopting this report, is a by-law or agreement required? If so, it should be referenced in the recommendation section.

By-law required yes no

Agreement(s) or other documents to be signed by Mayor and/or City Clerk yes no

Is the necessary by-law or agreement being sent concurrently to Council? yes no