

# CORPORATE POLICY AND PROCEDURE



---

POLICY	<b>Community Gardens Policy</b>
CATEGORY	Interdepartmental Policy
APPROVED BY	Barbara Powell, General Manager, Community Engagement, December 19, 2011
REVISION DATE	July 17, 2024
APPROVED BY	Gene Matthews, General Manager, Parks, July 17, 2024

---

## **POLICY STATEMENT**

Guided by our vision; to be the City that makes a difference, The Corporation of the City of Guelph believes in acting locally and globally to improve the lives of residents. The City of Guelph values, supports, and encourages the development of community gardens as an asset that enhances quality of life. Community gardens advance the City's strategic goal for a healthy and safe community where life can be lived to the fullest by contributing nutritious local food production, fitness, recreation, positive social interactions, environmental education, and stewardship and strong, engaged neighbourhoods.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to:

- Establish criteria for the selection of appropriate sites for community gardens.
- Provide direction to establish operational guidelines and best practice for successful community gardens.
- Establish a practice for community engagement and public comment prior to approving a community garden.

## **Definitions**

**Community Garden:** Community gardens are gardens located on parcels of land used by neighbourhood residents to grow their own vegetables, herbs, pollinator flowers and/or fruit. They are primarily used in areas where residents do not have any (or suitable) yard space to grow their own gardens. In a community garden, residents are granted a plot of land upon which they may grow vegetables and flowers. Residents share in the establishment, maintenance, and rewards of the garden. There are many different models of community gardens, including traditional vegetable gardens, pollinator gardens and even community orchards. These include:

---

### **Traditional community gardens**

A traditional community garden invites people to rent a plot to grow and harvest their own fruits, vegetables, herbs or flowers.

### **Communal garden**

In a communal garden, people garden as a team. They may share or donate some of the food they grow with local community groups or agencies.

### **Food forest**

Sometimes called a "community orchard" a food forest is a mixture of fruit trees and shrubs maintained by a group of volunteers, where everyone (including local wildlife) is welcome to enjoy the fruit.

### **Pollinator garden**

Pollinator garden feature plants and flowers that provide nectar and pollen resources for bees and other important insects. They can also provide food and habitat for other wildlife, or stormwater infiltration. Volunteers can help maintain the gardens and help inspire people to create pollinator gardens on their own properties.

**Community Group:** a group of community people interested in a community garden, this can include but is not limited to a neighbourhood group, service club or garden group.

**The City:** The City means the Corporation of the City of Guelph.

**Donation Garden or Plot:** is a full garden or plot within a garden where food or flowers are planted, tended and harvested with the intent to be donated to food banks, cupboards and community kitchens etc.

**Drainage Swale:** means a landscape feature consisting of a carefully formed and shallow trough-like depression within a turf that carries water during rain storms or snow melts.

**Food Security:** means when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active healthy life. (1996 World Food Summit definition)

**Gardeners:** Individuals who have an interest or who are currently gardening at a community garden.

**Garden Coordinator:** is the volunteer organizing the Community Garden in their area or neighbourhood and represents the collective garden group and shall serve as the point of contact between the garden and the City.

**Liability Insurance:** means insurance to protect the insured from the risks of liabilities.

---

**Machinery:** Any mechanical electrical or gas powered device used for performing or assists with the performance of a human task.

**Public Property:** real property owned or controlled by a governmental or similar organization.

**Park Land:** means land officially zoned as a park.

**Underutilized Land:** is defined as land not being used to its potential.

**Second:** is the volunteer organizing the community garden in their area or neighbourhood should the Garden Coordinator be unavailable.

**Subsidy:** is an elimination or reduction in regular fees to accommodate financial accessibility for an individual or family.

### **1 City Support for Community Gardens**

The City of Guelph will work in partnership with community groups, neighbourhood groups and gardening organizations to support Community Gardens both on city lands and off city lands as appropriate. Subject to available resources the City will assist with:

**1.1 Partnerships:** The City of Guelph will support Community Gardens in Guelph with a continued partnership with the Upper Grand District School Board, the Wellington Catholic District School Board and other partners and landowners. The City will support the community garden network to meet goals of knowledge sharing, skill, and capacity building and to encourage interaction, engagement and access to Community Gardens.

**1.2 Coordination:** The City of Guelph will offer coordination of Community Gardens via the Guelph Community Garden Network Working Group. For establishing new gardens on city lands, the City of Guelph will facilitate an application process, which will include establishing links to relevant City departments to establish operational constraints, and facilitating a neighbourhood community survey to assess community support and connect with other gardens and gardeners.

**1.3 City Operational Support:** Where appropriate and available, The City of Guelph may provide the following support to all in the Community Garden Network (including those off City property). Support may include the following:

- Wood mulch delivery
- Water barrel donations,
- Communications support; surveys, website, community guide & promotion for garden programs, activities, and social media,
- Support and coordination of the network and resource/best management practice sharing

---

#### **1.4 Additional City Operational Support available only to gardens on city-property:**

- Community engagement; via mailings, surveys, site meetings, focus groups as appropriate
- Site assessments (via internal staff circulation), utility locates; this will not include soil tests (soil tests are required to be done by project proponent)
- Site preparation; staking out and first tilling of garden area, installing garden sign, tool storage solutions (as appropriate and subject to availability)
- Water; access via existing water chambers in parks, consultation for water solutions (i.e. rainwater harvesting), as well as consideration of capital upgrades with park re-development, donation of rain barrels via water services programs
- Grass maintenance; mowing and other grass maintenance, consistent with regular turf maintenance schedules, around the perimeter of the garden where standard machinery can access the grass. Grass cutting within the garden area such as on pathways is the responsibility of the Community Garden group and its gardeners.
- Waste Removal; waste removal of yard waste materials can be arranged by request.
- Donation of native plants as available (herbaceous and woody)

## **2 Site Selection**

All requests for Community Gardens on City property must follow the process for applications, garden groups, and the site criteria and selection outlined below. Where appropriate, Community Gardens could be established on City property without the initiation of an application; however, similar criteria and approvals will be considered prior to implementation. The following criteria must be met for Community Garden site approval.

### **2.1 Application Process**

- Community members interested in community gardening, garden groups, community groups or neighbourhood groups will contact the Community Gardens Coordinator in writing to express interest in a community garden. This will be followed with a more detailed application form.
- Applications for Community Gardens can be submitted at any time throughout the year but applications must be received by October 31<sup>st</sup> or the first business day following October 31<sup>st</sup> to begin the site selection process for the growing season of the following year.
- The City will work with the garden group to meet all requirements for approval of a Community Garden. Approvals from the City for complete applications including all testing and permits will be received by the Community Garden group prior to the growing season.

---

## **2.2 Site Selection Process**

- The City will work with the community group to identify and assess viable sites that meet the criteria to choose an appropriate site.
- A garden site plan will be prepared and submitted to the Community Gardens Coordinator who will circulate it with other City departments for review and comment.
- The site plan will include plot layouts and other features including structures such as compost bins or storage structures, perennial plants. Soil amendments or fill materials and materials for pathways must also be defined.
- Minimum setbacks of 5 meters from edges of Community Gardens to surrounding amenities, property lines, hedgerows and trees to allow for regular park maintenance equipment may be required.
- The City of Guelph "Facility Accessibility Design Manual Standards" (FADMS) should be considered in site plan where feasible Features such as crushed limestone-screening pathways to accessible plots and garden amenities, raised beds and other accessibility features are encouraged. The City will offer information and/ or consultation for FADM and will assist with funding requests from outside funders to apply for grants to promote accessibility for all people.
- The City and the community garden group will hold a consultation process with the neighbours near the potential site. This will include surveys and may include neighbourhood meetings, petitions and outreach tools. On site meetings are encouraged.
- The City reserves the right to deny a site or alter a site plan at its sole discretion.

## **2.3 Garden Group Criteria**

- Supportive community garden members
- Volunteers willing to develop, and maintain the community garden (recommend approximately 6 interested volunteers)
- Volunteers willing to be the Garden Coordinator and Second to manage and coordinate the garden
- Gardeners in close proximity to garden site
- Ability of Group to obtain Liability Insurance
- Ability and willingness to complete all applications and apply for all outside permits such as initial soil quality tests

## **2.4 Site criteria**

- An area that receives 6 or more hours of sunlight daily
- Setback from surrounding amenities, property lines, hedgerows and trees (even immature ones that do not yet cast too much shade) and nearest trails (Exact setbacks to be determined on a case-by-case basis. Recommendation is 4 -6 m setback from surrounding property lines and 60 cm-1m setback from nearby trails)
- Suitable soil quality and drainage
- Availability of water (via existing water chamber or already planned water infrastructure upgrades). Sufficient water for irrigation for the appropriate style of garden must be available onsite. For some

---

gardens water may be harvested and stored in rain barrels or cisterns from the roof of an existing building or nearby water body.

- In an area that will not interfere with other uses i.e. recreational sportsfields
- In an area that will not interfere with water drainage and site maintenance.
- Walkable to the gardening community and accessible to parking and or transit
- Sightlines are unobstructed to the garden from the street or other amenities
- Slope of the land/garden will be considered on a case by case basis. Flat areas are considered easier to garden and are recommended for novice gardeners.
- At no point during the construction or operation of the garden shall the existing drainage of the area be changed or modified. This includes filling in of existing drainage swales, or redirecting the natural overland flow of water.

### **2.5 Preparing Potential Community Gardens in City Parks**

- During park construction, potential for community gardens will be considered if conditions under 2.4 Site Criteria are met. Other considerations may include current demand from community members (i.e. waitlists at nearby community gardens) and the historical background of the park (i.e. previous applications rejected due to past concerns). Preparation will include providing topsoil suitable for a community garden design of approximately 200m<sup>2</sup>.
- These potential sites will be shared and reviewed using the Site Selection Process (Section 2.2) to understand potential support and concerns. This may include internal review, Community Garden Working Group and further community engagement. A garden group will need to come forward and complete a portion of the application process before further site preparation is initiated. If such a group is not identified the potential community garden will remain dormant until a coordinator steps forward.
- Identifying potential community gardens with some site preparation will leverage construction efficiencies and allow the application process to be expedited, allowing for new community gardens to be established quickly and efficiently, and with the soil and water resources that will help the garden thrive.

### **3 Garden Implementation and Construction**

Following the successful application and site selection the restrictions and approvals below must be met.

- Prior to any garden activity or construction, a Community Garden Agreement must be signed by the Garden Coordinator and the City. This agreement is in place until either party ends it or a new coordinator takes over.
- Structures, materials, use of machinery and site plan must be approved prior to construction.

- 
- Utility locates and soil tests must be acquired and satisfactory before the initial garden digging or any garden construction or activity occurs.

#### **4 Conditions of Use**

The Community Garden Coordinator and Gardeners must agree to develop, operate and maintain the gardens according to the "Community Garden Agreement" with the City that will further identify all terms of use. The conditions of use herein shall not supersede any existing by-laws. Conditions may include but are not limited to:

- Garden developed at no cost to City other than City supports identified in Section 1. The City will provide operation and monitoring support as needed, including the donation of water barrels to each new community garden in 2016 and beyond, as an effort to ensure water sustainability and reduce dependency on City water.
- The garden shall be clearly signed as a Community Garden.
- Garden Coordinator or second/ designate to be available to respond to concerns within 24 hours. The name and contact information of the garden coordinator will be provided to the City at the beginning of each season.
- Garden group must provide rules of operation and waiver to each gardener.
- Use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers are prohibited.
- Soil amendments are to include compost and composted manure only.
- Compost bins, fencing, other garden structures and plots are to be well maintained.
- Pets are prohibited in garden area.
- Prohibited plants are not to be planted or encouraged to grow. Prohibited plants include illegal, invasive plants or noxious weeds, and aggressive plants, cannabis, any tree or shrub not on the most current version of the City of Guelph's list of approved Fruit and Nut species list (contact staff for up to date list) or any tree or shrub not approved in writing by city staff.
- Produce grown in community gardens is to be primarily for personal use and consumption, or for donation if the community garden or plot is a donation garden or plot. Some community gardens may choose to conduct fundraising activities to cover garden maintenance costs. The goal of community garden projects must be community food security and not for profit purposes.
- Gardeners can have their agreement for the Community Garden revoked due to non-compliance with the agreement and rules of use signed by each gardener. Discipline and removal procedures are to be progressive and based on severity of non-compliance. Removal is to be executed by the City.
- Gardeners and Garden Coordinators must be selected using an open and transparent process with intention for all interested neighbours or community members to be given equal chance to have access to new or available plots. The standard practice of providing first choice of plots to returning gardeners to support ongoing continuity and sustainability of the gardens is reasonable, however garden groups should give consideration to the residents best served by community gardens programs in their selection process for the remaining available plots.
- Size of garden plots to be defined by garden group using the area of the full garden and number of interested gardeners. Plots should be of a size to accommodate interest and also offer reasonable growing space.

- 
- Permission for fencing, compost bins and sheds must be requested in writing. Written approval may include preclusions which need to be adhered to or permission could be revoked.
  - Structures constructed of wood or timber must be untreated.
  - With respect to gardens located in termite areas, wood is strictly prohibited. Soil testing identifying the site as suitable for vegetable gardening must be submitted to the City before any garden or other garden related community activities occur on a potential site.
  - Utility locates must be performed before any digging for initial soil preparation, fencing, building or any other activity which will be greater than 2 feet in depth and go beyond regular digging expected for ongoing gardening. Utility locates expire after 60 days; therefore they will need to be renewed with each new activity. Current locate information must be on-site at the time of digging or tilling.
  - Gardeners and Garden Coordinators must comply with the City of Guelph Respect and Responsibility Policy (R Zone). There is zero tolerance for abusive or violent behavior in any program or facility.
  - Fees for plots should only be charged to cover basic garden related costs such as covering the cost for soil testing, installing new fencing, or purchasing compost. Efforts should be made to accommodate individuals or a family who would benefit from the garden but have identified the fee is prohibitive by offering an exemption for subsidy for this fee.

## **5 Private & School Property**

The City recognizes sites on School Board and private property such as churches may be more appropriate than available public lands within some neighbourhoods. The City is willing to provide in kind City supports where applicable (as described in section 1.3), appropriate and allowable by both the City and the property owner to encourage community gardening as a healthy and valuable program for all communities.

## **6 User Agreements/ License for Use**

The Garden Coordinator responsible for the garden will be responsible for obtaining user agreements with each gardener. The user agreement must include all conditions of use listed above in this policy and any other rules of use that are specific to each group's garden. An unsigned copy of the user agreement for each community garden will be kept on file at the City for reference. The registration process and the forms for each gardener should be kept on file with the garden coordinator as long as the gardener/ garden is active. In accordance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA) when a season is complete, a gardener leaves his or her plot for any reason or the garden is no longer in use, the registration form and all other forms with personal information will be shredded and a record of destruction form will be kept on file. Garden groups are required to provide their own liability insurance in the amount of 2 million dollars.

## **7 Evaluations and Statistical Reporting**

Evaluations and statistics provide information to assist in ensuring community gardens and community related garden programming is valued and understood.



---

The City requests a report of the following updated information from all network members annually, a template or survey will be provided:

- Number of Gardeners
- Number of plots
- Size of plots
- Waiting list information if applicable
- Number of returning gardeners
- Any fees charged to gardeners
- Number of garden plots accessed as a result of subsidy
- A statement recording the number of plots accessible for gardeners with a physical disability

In addition to the above statistical information other voluntary survey material will also be distributed.

Garden Coordinators are encouraged to offer evaluations and information about donations, volume of food produced for special garden programs, food security programs; related food skilling programs and value added volunteering that was made possible due to the garden.

### **8 Site Expansions/ Reduction**

Site expansion or reduction can be considered by the City provided the expansion is desired by the community and both the garden group and garden coordinator have the capacity to coordinate the extra gardening activities and the site has sufficient space to accommodate an expansion without interfering with other uses. A garden expansion will need to follow an application for expansion. Written notice expressing interest in garden expansion or reduction to the City is required before any activity begins.

### **9 Risk Management**

To ensure the health and safety of all gardeners and community groups the following procedures are required.

- Use of machinery of any kind is permitted, providing the machine is used in a garden with an existing insurance agreement that is pre-approved by the Community Gardens Coordinator. If a mishap with machinery should happen in a garden, including but not limited to, an injury or a fuel spill, the machinery should be turned off and the use discontinued and the garden coordinator and the City should be notified at once.
- First-aid kits shall be made available by the garden group at each site in a designated storage area and all gardeners and garden volunteers shall be advised of its location.
- Any accidents or incidents must be reported to the Garden Coordinator (volunteer) who will fill out an incident or accident form.
- Signage will be displayed on site that will include information on who to contact to get involved in the garden and the garden address (for emergency responders)
- Garden tools kept on site should be secured
- City water vaults (underground water access) used for irrigation must be kept locked and closed when not in use. To eliminate risk of near-by park

---

and trail users accidentally falling in the vaults, even when in use (hose connected and turned on) the vault door must kept partially shut. Efforts should also be made to minimize the amount of time the vault is open with the priority being to use it to fill larger containers and/or barrels which can be then used to distribute the water after the vault is fully closed.

### **10 Policy Review**

The Community Gardens Policy will be reviewed as needed as operational or other program changes arise. Comments from any City of Guelph department related to policy or concerns of the community garden program shall be forwarded to the community gardens coordinator to be included in the policy review. The Community Gardens Coordinator will meet with the Community Gardens Network Working Group approximately monthly and/or as needed to monitor and evaluate the program community wide and provide ongoing program support. Changes to policy are formalized by agreement from the General Manager of Parks

### **11 Funding**

Funding for community gardens is the sole responsibility of the individual garden groups at each community garden site. This does not include the support provided in Section 1. When possible and for the purpose of grant applications the City of Guelph will make available dollar value information related to the in-kind support provided by each department supporting the Community Garden Program.

### **12 Garden Closures**

In the event a community garden group no longer wishes to manage and maintain a community garden before the Community Garden Agreement term is complete the garden group shall provide written notice that they wish to dissolve. A public input process will be undertaken to assess interest for other residents to assume the garden responsibilities. If there is insufficient interest the garden structures and yard waste are to be taken away by the garden group. The City will re-seed or sod the area.