



Planning and Development

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January 27th, 2023

Jocelyn Wainwright
City of Owen Sound
808 2nd Avenue East
Owen Sound, Ontario
N4K 2H4

Re: Request for Comments on Draft Community Gardens Policy

Dear Ms. Wainwright,

This correspondence is in response to the above noted Request for Comments, in relation to the City's Draft Community Gardens Policy. County staff have had an opportunity to review the proposed amendments in relation to the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) and the County of Grey Official Plan (OP). General planning comments have also been provided in relation to the County's strategic planning documents, which include the approved Climate Change Action Plan; and Age-Friendly Community Strategy and Action Plan. We offer the following comments.

Section 7.12 of the County's Official Plan speaks to the design and usage of Parks and Open Space:

5) The design of new parks, or redesign of existing parks, are encouraged to be age-friendly accessible spaces, offering a wide range of passive and active recreational opportunities. The development of parkland and recreational facilities, and services should be done in consultation with local residents and in cooperation with other providers such as school boards. Establishing parks adjacent to school sites is encouraged.

6) Consider the need for further forms of parks such as dog parks (leash on or leash off), trampoline parks, skateboard, bicycle, or roller skate parks, food forests or community gardens, or water-based activity parks.

The draft policy identifies several existing City parks that would be appropriate for the establishment of Community Gardens, subject to meeting the identified policy considerations. In any future redesign of these parks to support a Community Garden proposal, the County would encourage the City to incorporate accessible and age-friendly features. Such features could include:

- Solid-surface pathways to support mobility devices
- Raised planting beds at a variety of heights to support a range of movement abilities (for instance, some older adults may prefer a higher gardening bed to avoid crouching, while a mid-height bed might better accommodate a person in a wheelchair)
- Shaded seating areas in proximity to gardening area to permit breaks on hot days

- Storage on site for sharing tools, etc.

County staff note that the draft document identifies consideration for some of the plots to be reserved for children, with a focus on inter-generational programming and partnership with non-profit organisations. The County is supportive of these community-focused, age-friendly considerations.

One of the identified action items of the County's Age-Friendly Community Action Plan states:

8.9: Community Garden Initiative: Map out all existing facilities and identify opportunities for new gardens that would enhance food security. Explore existing database on 211.

As County staff and community partners begin to move forward with the implementation targeted Age-Friendly action-items, we look forward to further connection and collaboration with City staff in this respect.

One recommendation within the circulated Staff Report notes that City staff intend to update the City's Community Improvement Plan to recognize 'Community Gardens' as an eligible project through the CIP Landscaping and Property Improvement Grant Program. County staff are supportive of this direction and would inquire whether there could be merit in extending the reach of the program to consider support for Community Gardens on appropriate lands owned by non-profit community organisations. Expansion of this program could generate further potential for the benefit of new community gardens to be shared and maintained by existing organizations who currently work with vulnerable community groups.

The proposal has been reviewed by the County's Manager of Climate Change, and Trails and Forestry Coordinator. At a high-level the proposed policy aligns well with the County's Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP), *Going Green in Grey*. Further alignment could be achieved if the policy were to speak to community gardening practices that enhance biodiversity and encourage growth of native plant species. Staff note that there is strong alignment with Action 19 of the CCAP, in relation to resident engagement in community gardens to encourage and learn more about local food production. Alongside the goal of food production, County staff would suggest that the policy may be strengthened by promoting references to garden types that promote climate action and ecosystem protection, such as pollinator gardens, rain gardens, etc.

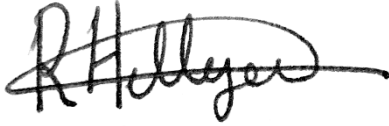
The County would commend the City for updating this policy to increase opportunities for Community Gardens, which provide important opportunities for outdoor recreation, urban food security, social cohesion, climate action, and general community sustainability.

We kindly request notice of any decision taken regarding the finalization of these policies.

If you wish to discuss this matter further, please contact me.

Yours truly,

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Hillyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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