

## CORPORATE POLICY



Policy Title: **Community Garden Program Policy**  
Policy Category: **Municipal Services**  
Policy No.: M-012  
Department: Community Services  
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Parks By-law  
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Key Word(s):

### **POLICY STATEMENT:**

The City of Waterloo's Community Garden Program enhances community wellbeing by providing low-cost opportunities to garden and connect with neighbours. Dedicated volunteers, with the support of City staff, develop and manage community gardens on City-owned land. This program provides access to fresh and affordable produce, helps promote neighbourhood cohesion and vibrancy, activates public spaces, supports environmental education, encourages sustainable community practices, and motivates active living.

### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines for developing and operating community gardens that are supported through the City of Waterloo's Community Garden Program. The policy defines suitable garden sites, outlines program parameters, identifies the roles and responsibilities of garden volunteers and City staff, and supports safe and equitable program participation.

### **DEFINITIONS:**

**Applicant(s):** Waterloo resident(s) who has/have contacted City staff with an interest in establishing a new community garden.

**City:** The Corporation of the City of Waterloo.

**City-owned land:** Property owned by the City that can be used and accessed by the public including but not limited to park land and property adjacent to City-owned buildings.

**City staff:** An individual employed by the City and working within a division involved in delivering the Community Garden Program.

**City staff liaison(s):** A City staff member who administers the program and acts as the first point of contact for garden volunteers and as a resource for all community garden inquiries.

**Community garden:** A place where people come together to grow vegetables, herbs, fruits, and flowers in individual or shared plots. The gardens are coordinated and maintained by volunteers.

**Community garden footprint:** The approved maximum area of a community garden. Approved footprints will vary by location and may change through an expansion.

**Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles:** Principles for designing the built environment to reduce fear and incidence of crime and improve quality of life. Principles include natural surveillance, natural access control, territorial reinforcement, and mechanical forms of surveillance and access control.

**Expansion:** Increase in the size of the approved garden footprint. An expansion is not considered a modification. All expansions must be approved by City staff before implementation.

**Fence:** A structure constructed to mark the boundary of an area. Fences may be constructed around the perimeter of the community garden footprint or individual plots.

**Flood plain:** Lands subject to flooding as regulated by the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA).

**Garden lead:** A volunteer in a garden team who is the primary contact with the City for information distribution regarding the community garden. A garden lead must be officially accepted and registered by the City in the Community Garden Program and is supervised by designated City staff. Garden leads must be 18 years of age or older.

**Garden participant:** An individual that is not a member of the garden team, who participates at the community garden (for example, a person that is allocated an individual plot or contributes to the care of a shared plot).

**Garden team:** A group comprised of three to five garden volunteers including a garden lead that is responsible for developing and managing the garden.

**Garden volunteer:** Anyone who, without compensation or expectation of compensation, performs a task at the direction of and on behalf of the City. A garden volunteer must be officially accepted and registered by the City in the Community Garden Program and supervised by designated City staff. A garden volunteer must be 18 years of age or older.

**Impoundments:** Manmade water features that were historically used as mill ponds that collect runoff from surrounding surface drainage and creek systems.

**Management:** City staff at the Supervisor, Manager, Director, and/or Commissioner level who are responsible for management of community garden operations and the Community Garden Program.

**Modification:** Any change, improvement, or augmentation to an existing garden within the approved community garden footprint. An expansion is not considered a

modification as it involves increasing the size of the approved garden footprint. Modifications could include installing a structure or reconfiguring the garden layout. All modifications must be approved by City staff before implementation.

**Operating a community garden how-to guide:** A City guide that provides information about operating and maintaining a community garden. The document is available online and is provided to members of garden teams and garden applicants.

**Plot:** The individual garden space provided to garden participants or garden volunteers for cultivating vegetables, herbs, fruits, and/or flowers.

**Public right-of-way(s):** Public right-of-way, also known as municipal road allowance, refers to a piece of City-owned land. It includes the roadways, sidewalks, cul-de-sacs, boulevards, and a section of land used for utility services (such as electrical equipment, water mains, gas lines and telecommunication cables).

**Repair:** Fixing or amending an existing part of a community garden.

**Starting a community garden how-to guide:** A City guide that provides information about starting a community garden. The document is available online and is provided upon request to individuals interested in establishing a new community garden.

**Storm Water Management Pond (SWM):** Engineered facility created to collect runoff from surrounding surface drainage and the local storm sewer system following a rainfall, snowmelt, or water use by residents (i.e. watering lawns and washing cars).

## **SCOPE:**

The policy establishes the conditions necessary for implementing a new community garden and operating an existing community garden as part of the City's Community Garden Program.

The policy applies to:

- Waterloo residents that are interested in establishing a community garden as part of the Community Garden Program;
- All garden volunteers that are responsible for a community garden that is part of the Community Garden Program;
- All garden participants who participate in the Community Garden Program; and,
- City staff involved in the delivery of the Community Garden Program.

## **POLICY COMMUNICATION:**

The policy will be communicated by way of:

- Posting on the City website,
- Posting on the City intranet accessible by staff,
- Communicating the policy to all new garden applicants, garden volunteers and garden leads upon approval of a community garden, and
- Communicating the policy to new City staff that will support program operations as needed.

**POLICY:****1.0 Applying for new community gardens**

1.1 Waterloo residents interested in establishing a community garden on City-owned land are encouraged to connect with City staff at [community gardens](#) to learn more. City staff can provide interested community members with a how-to guide for starting a community garden to support the process.

1.2 Prospective garden sites are evaluated by City staff. City staff will use the following criteria to determine the suitability of a site:

- a) Proximity to existing community gardens;
- b) General site conditions including environmental hazards, soil quality and drainage, and sun exposure;
- c) Proximity to SWM pond, impoundment, or flood plain;
- d) Ownership of the site;
- e) Future changes planned for the site;
- f) Existing amenities and uses of the site;
- g) Ease of access for gardeners;
- h) Impacts to surrounding neighbourhood;
- i) Access to a suitable water source;
- j) Expressed community support; and
- k) Alignment with Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) Principles.

1.2.1 Community gardens cannot be built in public right-of-ways.

1.2.2 When considering distance between potential community gardens and existing community gardens, safety considerations such as proximity to expressways, arterial roads, and active railway lines will be taken into consideration.

1.2.3 Prospective garden sites that are not located on City-owned land, may be supported through the Community Garden Program when the land is publicly owned, publicly accessible, and there is support from the property owner. Privately operated community gardens located on private property are not supported through this program.

1.3 Residents who wish to establish a community garden in their neighbourhood, who believe the proposed site is suitable based on the above criteria and have gathered initial community support, should contact City staff at [Gardens](#) to express interest.

1.3.1 Applicants are encouraged to express interest a minimum of one full year before they are interested in starting a community garden to allow sufficient time for planning.

1.4 Upon receiving a request to establish a new community garden, City staff will use criteria listed in section 1.2 to evaluate the suitability of the proposed site.

1.4.1 If a proposed site is deemed unsuitable, the City staff liaison will contact the applicant(s) to discuss alternative options, which may include recommendations for an alternate location for the community garden.

- 1.4.2 If City staff determine that a proposed site is suitable for a new community garden, the City staff liaison will contact the applicant to begin the process of developing a new community garden.
- 1.4.3 If there is not a suitable site for a garden in the applicants' neighbourhood, sites in surrounding neighbourhoods may be considered when they are located in close proximity to the applicant and there is expressed community support.
- 1.5 The City will prioritize interested applicants on a first-come, first-serve basis.
- 1.5.1 City staff have the authority to approve, disapprove, and prioritize new garden sites as needed.
- 1.5.2 In the event that the City receives more interest than can be accommodated, applicants will be added to a waitlist. Applicants on the waitlist will be prioritized by the date they are added to the list.
- 1.5.3 The number of new gardens that will be developed annually will be determined by City staff based on existing resources.
- 1.6 Prior to establishing a new community garden, the applicant(s) must contact neighbours who live in the neighbourhood of the proposed garden site. Contact may be made by letter, flyer, social media, direct visit, and/or other individualized contact. City staff will support applicants to inform neighbours of the proposed garden site.
- 1.6.1 In situations where a proposed new community garden is disputed and a resolution cannot be reached, the Commissioner responsible for the Community Garden Program will make a final decision, considering site conditions and community benefits.
- 1.7 Once a site for a community garden is approved by City staff, a garden lead must be identified to City staff and the garden lead must establish a garden team with three to five committed volunteers.
- 1.8 When a new community garden has been approved, City staff will communicate plans by letter to the residences immediately surrounding the garden location.

## **2.0 Developing a new community garden**

- 2.1 Once a new community garden has been approved, all prospective garden volunteers will be required to complete an online volunteer application form, volunteer waivers, and training prior to the start of the volunteer term.
- 2.1.1 A City staff liaison will contact garden teams during the spring season prior to the opening of the community garden to arrange completion of the online form.
- 2.1.2 Volunteer application forms, waivers, and training must be completed during volunteer registration. Individuals who have acted as a garden volunteer in a previous season for a City community garden must complete any new required forms and/or training as per program communications or updates from Volunteer Services or City staff liaison.
- 2.2 Prior to constructing a new community garden, a site plan must be approved by City staff. City staff will work with the garden team to determine a suitable

location and design the site plan. Site plans must include an overview of the proposed garden site and illustrate where all plots will be located.

2.2.1 Gardens should be designed in an accessible manner. City staff will work with applicants to promote accessibility at garden locations.

2.2.2 Gardens must adhere to the following design requirements:

- a) Be designed to support community use,
- b) Have mulched paths in between plots (City staff will not maintain grass in between plots),
- c) Have a means to effectively deal with compost and garden waste, and
- d) Have access to a suitable water source.

2.2.3 Site plans must consider placement of other supporting infrastructure, such as sheds, storage spaces, and composters.

2.2.4 If required, the Director of Parks, Forestry, and Cemetery Services may waive design requirements listed in section 2.2 for new gardens.

2.2.5 All proposed garden designs will be reviewed for alignment with CPTED principles and the Parkland Strategy.

2.3 There are three different types of gardens that garden teams may construct (or a combination thereof):

- a) Raised beds: Individual plots raised above ground level that are created from frames of approved material and filled with soil.
- b) In-ground beds: Individual plots of soil at ground level separated by mulched pathways.
- c) Shared in-ground bed: Large plot of soil that is communally maintained and shared by all garden participants.

2.3.1 Site plans must indicate the type of garden being proposed.

2.4 Applicant(s) are responsible for costs associated with constructing a new garden or expanding/modifying an existing garden. Interested applicant(s) may apply for grants offered by the City to help cover costs.

2.5 Once the site plan has been prepared, the garden lead and garden volunteers will meet on site with City staff to review the design. If changes are required, they will be communicated by City staff.

2.6 Once the final site plan has been approved by City staff, the garden lead and garden volunteers will coordinate the build of the community garden.

2.6.1 If required, City staff or an approved contractor, will use heavy equipment for excavation or rototilling on parkland. If this work is required for a garden, it will take place the fall or spring prior to the first desired planting season.

2.6.2 Underground utility locates must be obtained before any digging or site work occurs. City staff will obtain locates once notified of the garden build date by the garden team.

2.6.3 The garden team is responsible for coordinating the build of the approved garden. This will include coordinating tasks such as arranging needed supplies, constructing raised beds, and/or other infrastructure that

has been approved by City staff, and spreading mulch on the garden pathways.

2.6.4 Any vehicles or motorized equipment accessing the site must apply for a Park Access Permit.

2.6.5 When building the community garden, garden volunteers are permitted to use select hand tools and power tools if they have signed the "Use of Power Tools Acknowledgement for Community Garden Volunteers." For more information on acceptable tool use, review section 4.8.

2.6 City staff will provide resources to support the development of new community gardens. Resources include, but are not limited to:

- a) A starting a community garden how-to guide,
- b) Guidance and assistance from City staff throughout the design and construction process,
- c) Purchase and installation of two signs (one with garden name and one with rules),
- d) One picnic table, and
- e) Annual spring delivery of wood chip mulch (upon request).

### **3.0 Operating a community garden**

3.1 City staff will provide all garden volunteers with an operating a community garden how-to guide that includes information to support community garden operations.

3.2 The community garden season will take place between May 1 and October 31. Exact start and end dates will be determined by each garden team but must be within the May to October timeframe. City staff will work to have water services turned on during these times based on capacity of the City staff responsible for start-up and winterization of the water sources.

3.3 City staff develop garden rules to promote safety and program success. Rules are posted on a sign at community gardens, listed in how-to guides, and communicated to garden leads and volunteers. All garden team volunteers and garden participants must adhere to the rules.

3.3.1 Rules are subject to change. If rules are changed, garden teams will be notified.

3.3.2 Garden teams will be responsible for monitoring compliance with the rules. Garden participants who fail to comply with the rules may forfeit garden membership.

3.4 In addition to the rules developed by City staff, garden leads and garden volunteers will be responsible for developing guidelines to support operations at their respective gardens.

3.4.1 Garden teams are encouraged to establish a fair and equitable process for allocating garden plots.

3.4.2 Garden teams may choose to charge a nominal annual membership fee to cover ongoing operational costs of the garden. If a fee is charged, it must be affordable and not profit generating. Garden teams are encouraged to consider

reducing or waiving fees to encourage access for all interested garden participants.

3.4.3 Guidelines must be shared with garden participants.

3.4.4 Garden teams are responsible for monitoring compliance with guidelines they create.

3.5 To support garden operations, the City will provide each community garden with the following supplies and support:

- a) An operating a community garden how-to guide;
- b) Lawn care and maintenance in the park area surrounding the community garden;
- c) Purchase of plot and garden insurance for registered members through the City of Waterloo's insurance provider;
- d) All registered volunteers are covered under the City's liability insurance when acting within program guidelines as set out in this policy, volunteer position descriptions, and the operating community garden how-to guide; and
- e) Guidance and assistance from City staff.

3.6 Other than regular lawn care and waste management, the City will not be responsible for the maintenance of community gardens beyond the initial rototilling or excavating of the soil prior to the community garden build in the initial year.

3.7 Garden leads must report any vandalism, damage, or needed repair of the community garden infrastructure and amenities to their City staff liaison.

3.8 City staff may choose to move or remove a community garden at any time.

Reasons for moving or removing a community garden include but are not limited to: the community garden is not being actively used and/or maintained by the garden team to the satisfaction of the City; there is planned construction on or near the site; City staff determine that the site is no longer suitable based on criteria listed in section 1.2. If City staff determine that a community garden has to be moved or removed, the garden lead will be notified in advance.

#### **4.0 Modifying, expanding, or repairing a community garden**

4.1 Modifications or expansions to a community garden require the City's approval prior to implementation.

4.2 Garden teams interested in modifying or expanding the community garden must contact City staff at [community gardens](#) with details. Garden teams must submit a request for modification a minimum of 30 days in advance of the proposed action. For expansions, notification is required in the season prior to the proposed expansion.

4.3 A modification may involve installing infrastructure at the community garden. Possible infrastructure could include storage structures, rain barrels, fencing, compost systems, signage, picnic tables, and other fixtures.

4.3.1 Fences that will surround the perimeter of the garden footprint must be reviewed and approved by City staff in advance of implementation.

4.3.2 Fences that will surround individual plots must not interfere with other plots as per garden rules.



#### 4.3.2 Installations of infrastructure must:

- a) Be within the existing community garden footprint (unless expansion has been approved);
- b) Meet health and safety, design of public spaces, and facility accessibility design standards; and
- c) Be suitable for the site.

4.4 Expansions or modifications must not damage or create safety, maintenance, and/or park user concerns within the site or surrounding property.

4.5 City staff will review requests for modifications or expansions and notify garden leads as to the outcome of the review. Onsite meetings with City staff and the garden team may be required as part of the review process.

4.6 Underground utility locates must be obtained before any digging or site work occurs. City staff will obtain locates once notified of the modification and/or expansion date by garden team.

4.7 Repairs to existing infrastructure that are being performed by garden volunteers that have signed waivers do not require approval from City staff. If the garden volunteers have not signed a waiver or are using a third-party to perform the repair, the garden team must contact [community gardens](#) for approval. City staff will review requests for repairs and notify garden teams as to the outcome of the review.

4.8 Once a build, modification, repair, or expansion has been approved, garden volunteers may use acceptable hand or power tools to complete the work if they have signed the "Use of Power Tools Acknowledgement for Community Garden Volunteers."

4.8.1 Should a garden team wish to use household hand tools or power tools, these must be supplied by the garden team, including any associated costs.

4.8.2 Tools are to be used by registered volunteers that have completed necessary waivers, who are 18 years of age or over, and who have the requisite skills and experience to operate items safely. Tool operating manual guidelines should be followed at all times when in use. Equipment should always be in proper working order.

4.8.3 Acceptable tools include simple residential-grade tools such as hand tools (hammers, screwdrivers, and handsaws), power tools such as drills, power screwdrivers, and hand sanders that are intended for home use. Commercial grade equipment such as nail guns, screw guns, saws, or circular saws are not permitted.

4.8.4 Garden teams are responsible for the proper use and storage of tools and equipment. The City will not be responsible for repair or replacement of damaged tools.

## 5.0 Responsibilities of garden team

5.1 Garden volunteers will work with the City as registered volunteers and will complete necessary forms and waivers as required.

5.2 Garden leads are responsible for developing, operating, and maintaining community gardens as outlined in the starting and operating a community garden how-to guides. This includes but is not limited to:

- a) Leading a garden team of three to five volunteers and assigning tasks;
- b) Handling funds for garden plots and/or grant funding;
- c) Scheduling regular workdays throughout the garden season;
- d) Ensuring appropriate care and maintenance of garden and immediate surrounding area;
- e) Performing maintenance at the community garden including digging, planting, weeding, and shoveling;
- f) Ensuring proper use, maintenance, and storage of acceptable tools;
- g) Maintaining regular communication with City staff liaison;
- h) Collaborating with garden volunteers to ensure all tasks are divided;
- i) Assigning plots to garden participants in a fair and equitable manner;
- j) Gathering contact information from garden participants;
- k) Reporting any vandalism and/or damage to their City staff liaison;
- l) Understanding and complying with the City's how-to guides;
- m) Following the City's Safety First City volunteer guidelines;
- n) Acting honestly and in good faith in the best interests of the City;
- o) Ensuring garden volunteers are aware of potential risks and proper use of acceptable tools;
- p) Monitoring compliance with garden rules and guidelines;
- q) Complying with this policy, volunteer role descriptions, and other requirements as they arise;
- r) Maintaining a waitlist should additional garden space be requested; and
- s) Obtaining approval from the City for repairs (when required), modifications, and/or expansions.

5.3 Garden volunteers are also responsible for developing, operating, and maintaining community gardens as outlined in the starting and operating a community garden how-to guides. This includes but is not limited to:

- a) Ensuring appropriate care and maintenance of garden and immediate surrounding area;
- b) Performing maintenance at community garden including digging, planting, weeding, and shoveling;
- c) Assisting in ensuring plots are assigned in a fair and equitable manner;
- d) Maintaining regular communication with garden lead;
- e) Understanding and complying with the City's how-to guides;

- f) Following the City's Safety First City volunteer guidelines;
- g) Acting honestly and in good faith in the best interests of the City;  
and
- h) Complying with this policy, volunteer role descriptions, and other requirements as they arise.

## **6.0 Responsibilities of City staff**

6.1 Community and Neighbourhood Services staff are responsible for supporting the Community Garden Program. This includes but is not limited to:

- a) Conducting program-specific volunteer management and administration, including recruitment, intake, monitoring and volunteer recognition;
- b) Complying with this policy;
- c) Addressing volunteer non-compliance with position descriptions, responsibilities set out in this policy, or guidelines set out in the starting and operating a community garden how-to guides;
- d) Encouraging compliance through education of risk management policies and procedures and applicable park bylaws;
- e) Responding to [community gardens](#) requests related to:
  - General public inquiries;
  - Volunteer matters;
  - New location or volunteer inquiries;
  - Volunteer forms;
  - Other requests from volunteers that are not routine maintenance or operational concerns;
  - Obtaining input on team discussions with Parks, Forestry, and Cemetery Services or applicable staff to respond to inquiries, and
  - General program inquiries related to program expectations, costs, and/or conditions.
- f) Developing and maintaining program documentation for program-specific volunteer and community communication (including how-to guides, policy, City webpage);
- g) Coordinating requirements for incident and accident reporting;
- h) Supporting neighbourhood activities centered around community gardens;
- i) Supporting volunteers through regular communication;
- j) Assisting with communication to neighbourhood residents regarding garden needs and changes.

6.2 Parks, Forestry, and Cemetery Services staff are responsible for supporting the Community Garden Program. This includes but is not limited to:

- a) Supplying, placing, and emptying recycling and garbage containers as part of routine property maintenance;
- b) Maintaining parkland and greenspace surrounding garden locations;

- c) Ensuring access to water source during the garden season and performing any necessary maintenance on water supply;
- d) Providing garden team volunteers with keys where applicable;
- e) Performing routine inspections of garden areas;
- f) Assessing prospective garden sites using criteria in section 1.2 to determine suitability;
- g) Attending onsite meetings with garden applicants to determine suitable locations for prospective community gardens;
- h) Supporting expansion, maintenance, and repair requests with applicable parks process and review of submitted applications;
- i) Supporting the build of community gardens by using heavy machinery and tools to excavate, remove sod, rototill garden, or deliver and spread soil. This involves obtaining locates prior to construction;
- j) Delivering and installing supportive materials, including signage, mulch, and picnic tables;
- k) Encouraging compliance through applicable park bylaws;
- l) Responding to maintenance requests and operational requests received through [community gardens](#), related but not limited to:
  - Water source issues,
  - Park seating or garbage requests,
  - Program equipment (signage, picnic tables),
  - Inquiries related to parks bylaws, and
  - Providing input on team discussions related to maintenance, expansion, and operational concerns.

6.3 Volunteer Services staff are responsible for supporting the Community Garden Program volunteers. This includes, but is not limited to:

- a) Supporting volunteer recruitment each season;
- b) Monitoring opportunities for reviews of volunteer role descriptions based on corporate practices;
- c) Facilitating the volunteer registration system and training updates;
- d) Supporting Better Impact and volunteer-related program questions;
- e) Providing annual corporate volunteer information;
- f) Notifying Community and Neighbourhood Services staff of corporate changes impacting volunteers.

6.4 Communications staff are responsible for supporting program communications, including but not limited to: signage, community education, posting on the website and social media, and other key messaging.

6.5 Management are responsible for supporting the Community Garden Program. This includes but is not limited to:

- a) Supporting City staff in the administration of the Community Garden Program and this policy;

- b) Providing leadership to City staff in the administration of the Community Garden Program;
- c) Providing support and leadership related to volunteer support, community support, conflict resolution, and risk management related to the Community Garden Program.

**COMPLIANCE**

In cases of policy violation, the City may investigate and determine appropriate corrective action.

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