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Item No. 10

**Halifax Regional Council
October 20, 2009**

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY: 

Paul Dunphy, Director, Community Development

DATE: September 14, 2009

SUBJECT: Community Gardening

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

The report originates from staff.

BACKGROUND

Community gardening offers many benefits for residents. It can be a way to increase interaction among neighbours, add to the beauty of an area, promote environmental stewardship, and encourage active living. Community gardening is also an opportunity for people to share skills and learn from one another.

Gardening is now Canada's second most popular physical activity after walking.¹ As a result many municipalities across North America have developed policies and procedures to facilitate community gardening.

A community garden is generally associated with a volunteer group starting, maintaining and managing a garden site. A community garden may include “common areas” with shared upkeep and/or individual plots (allotments). Some community gardens include flowers, some have fruit and vegetables, while others have a combination of plants. The common elements however, of any community garden, include the effort of a volunteer group in making decisions aimed at providing opportunities for the community to participate.

Community Gardens exist on public and private lands such as schools, universities, churches, not-for-profit, and HRM land. Within HRM, Council and staff are receiving an increasing number of requests from residents wishing to start or participate in community gardens. Specifically, residents are asking how to start gardens on HRM public land. They are often looking for general tips and information on gardening or seeking volunteer opportunities with existing community gardens.

Several community based organizations and networks are supporting community gardens by providing such things as workshops, advocacy, events, tours, maps of existing gardens, information meetings and web resources.

DISCUSSION

The former City of Dartmouth supported volunteer-led community gardening efforts through its Parks and Recreation Division. More recently, as a part of developing the Good Neighbours Great Neighbourhoods Tool Kit, staff recognized the need for clear operational procedures for handling new requests for community gardens. In the absence of a clear approach, requests are often handled in an ad-hoc manner. A business unit may not know who to refer the request to, what the approval procedure is, or what level of support HRM can provide. At present, there is no inventory of existing community gardens on HRM land. Clearer direction and operational

¹ CFLRI (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute)

procedures will support the communities' efforts and help to rationalize the use of HRM land for community gardens.

Supporting Policies, Initiatives, and Strategic Goals

There are policies, initiatives, and strategic goals in place now that lend support to the development of clear operational procedures for community gardens. They can be found in the Regional Plan, the Sustainable Environment Management initiatives, the Community Engagement Strategy, and the Good Neighbours Great Neighbourhoods civic pride initiative.

The Regional Plan contains several policies to support building stronger communities. Policy G-14 (I) states secondary planning strategies shall consider opportunities for integrating small scale food production and community gardening into site and building designs².

Sustainability is a strategic goal of the Infrastructure & Asset Management Business Unit and the Sustainable Environment Management Office (SEMO). HRM is committed to developing a sustainable community and has undertaken a range of initiatives in support of this goal. Ensuring sustainable land use is key to achieving a truly sustainable community.

HRM also recognizes community engagement is a basis for building healthy, strong and inclusive communities. Regional Council's approval of the Community Engagement Strategy supports a range of opportunities for residents to be actively involved in the cultural and civic life of their community³.

The Good Neighbours Great Neighbourhoods civic pride initiative seeks to promote voluntary participation in community life. It aims to encourage this behaviour by recognizing positive contributions, providing useful tools and resources and by creating a greater awareness of opportunities for active community participation.

Developing Operational Procedures for Community Gardens

Creating clear operational procedures will provide direction to municipal staff when handling requests for volunteer-led community gardens on HRM owned land. The operational procedures must strive to:

- enhance HRM's community based service delivery,
- increase opportunities to beautify neighbourhoods,
- provide access for citizen participation, interaction, and engagement, and

²Halifax Regional Municipality, *Municipal Regional Planning Strategy*, 2006

³Halifax Regional Municipality, *Community Engagement Strategy*, 2008

- increase opportunities for environmental sustainability.

For operational purposes, a community garden is defined as, “*an area of HRM public land where volunteers, who are part of a not-for-profit society, develop, manage and operate a small-scale garden containing vegetables, fruit, herbs, flowers, native and ornamental plants, in accordance with existing regulations, bylaws and assessments. Community gardens may have ‘common areas’ with shared upkeep as well as individual plots. Community gardens will involve a group effort in making decisions to start and operate a garden in order to provide opportunities for the community to participate.*”

HRM will support volunteer-led community gardens by allowing access to appropriate HRM public land subject to certain terms and conditions. Under no circumstances shall a community garden be permitted on any HRM Right-of-Way.

Community Application Process and Procedures

To facilitate a clear process, HRM will provide an application form and approval process for volunteer not-for-profit organizations requesting access to public property for the purpose of a community garden. The operating procedures will be provided and discussed with the volunteer organization. The application form, including a copy of relevant by-laws and supporting information, will be available at Community Recreation Centres, Customer Service Centres and on-line. A staff team will review each application to determine if the site is suitable for a community garden. If the site is not suitable, an alternative site(s) may be suggested. If approved, a pre-construction meeting will be scheduled. The organization is responsible for all expenses associated with operating and maintaining the garden. Staff will assist with capacity building and volunteer training opportunities.

Pilot Project

Goodness Grows Dartmouth approached Community Recreation this past spring to start a community garden at the Findlay Community Centre. As staff had already begun working on operational procedures, the opportunity to work with the Dartmouth group was seen as a great opportunity to ‘pilot’ ideas. The pilot project allowed staff to work directly with the community, receive feedback, and make improvements to the process - application form, operational procedures and approval flowchart - for future community gardening requests. Staff met on-site with the volunteers as they prepared to break ground and continue to act as a resource. Goodness Grows Dartmouth successfully launched their community garden on May 30, 2009.

On a go-forward basis, an inventory of existing community gardens on public land and other garden resources will also be developed. This will allow HRM to better serve the public by exposing all opportunities to participate in community gardens

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

There are no budget implications. Minimal in-kind services may be provided.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES/BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.html> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

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