



Committee of the Whole Report For the Meeting of June 6, 2019

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** May 17, 2019
From: Thomas Soulliere, Director, Parks, Recreation and Facilities
Subject: Update: *Growing in the City* Urban Food Program

RECOMMENDATION

That Council direct staff to proceed with the recommendations listed below, with all resource implications referred to the annual financial planning process;

- A: Expand City grant eligibility
- B: Pilot a City-built allotment garden
- C: Pilot City-sponsored distribution of gardening materials
- D: Investigate the re-introduction of the Sharing Backyards program
- E: Support access to agricultural water rates
- F: Establish food system targets and outcomes

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides Council with a progress update on the impact of Growing in the City (GITC) programs and recommends further actions to advance food system priorities outlined in the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan.

Since 2016, the City has implemented a number of actions and increased its resources to assist community-led food systems projects by introducing new granting streams, hiring a Food Systems Coordinator, and providing in-kind support to community gardens. Overall GITC programs, policies and bylaw amendments have been effective; however, limited progress in some areas indicate gaps and highlight opportunities to improve City support for urban gardening and food production.

In consultation with stakeholders including the Urban Food Table, staff have developed recommendations to further support urban gardening and food production. These actions are aligned with the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan objectives and outcomes related to food systems. Should Council approve the recommendations, staff will initiate the development of the proposed projects and identify resource requirements through the annual financial planning process.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on the impact of the Growing in the City programs and to identify opportunities to advance food systems objectives outlined in the 2019 – 2022 Strategic Plan.

BACKGROUND

The City of Victoria recognizes urban gardening and food production as a valuable community activity that contributes to health and well-being, positive social interaction, connecting to nature, environmental education, while creating healthy and diverse ecosystems, building neighbourhoods, and securing food.

In May 2015, Council approved the Growing in the City project charter to review, update, and expand City policies and guidelines for urban food production. GITC was developed in response to specific Official Community Plan (OCP) objectives and actions identified in the 2015-2018 Strategic Plan.

In February 2016, updated policies, regulations and guidelines were presented to Council (Appendix A –GITC Planning Report; Appendix B – GITC Parks Report). As directed by Council, six specific initiatives were implemented:

- A review and update of the Community Gardens Policy;
- An inventory of City-owned land for community food production;
- Guidelines for food-bearing trees on City-held lands;
- A final version of the Boulevard Gardening Guidelines;
- A review of City regulations and policies to explore the opportunity for, and implications of, supporting expanded small-scale commercial urban agriculture; and,
- Voluntary guidelines for food production in mixed use, multi-unit residential developments.

Since 2016, the City has increased resources available to assist community-led food systems projects. This includes:

- Creating a Food Systems Coordinator position to provide full-time support and coordination;
- Providing bi-annual deliveries of leaf mulch to community gardens and other eligible community gardening projects;
- Installing and maintaining water connections or split rail fencing in community gardens on City land;
- Waiving water charges for community gardens;
- Introducing the Community Garden Volunteer Coordinator Grant and increasing its value from \$6,000 in 2016 to \$10,000 in 2019;
- Introducing the Community Garden Micro-Grants;
- Supporting the Downtown Residents Association in opening the Yates Street Community Garden;
- Public resources (guides, fact sheets and workshops) to generate awareness and provide information on the new GITC policies, programs and guidelines. Appendix C provides a list of resources available to the public.
- Internal resources (guides and presentations) to support staff in adapting practices to new programs and regulations.

Council also approved a supplemental budget of \$15,000 starting in 2018, to cover City operational expenses related to community gardens. Table 1 details the grants and expenses related to community garden support.

Table 1. City grants and direct expenses related to community gardens

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Community Garden Volunteer Coordinator Grant				
Value of grants paid to recipients	\$ 36,000	\$ 36,000	\$ 48,864	\$ 80,000
Number of recipients*	7	7	9	9
Community Garden Micro Grant				
Value of grants paid to recipients	\$ 1,500	\$ 2,500	\$ 4,000	\$ 1,950
Number of recipients	3	5	8	4
Operational Expenses for Community Gardens				
Mulch deliveries, water connections, maintenance, site preparation	\$ 23,814	\$ 3,500	\$ 12,828	\$ 8,277**
Food Systems Coordinator				
Salary and benefits	\$ 88,671	\$ 90,730	\$ 92,549	\$95,916
Total	\$149,985	\$138,730	\$158, 241	\$186,143**

*The Fernwood Neighbourhood Grant is split equally between the Fernwood Community Association and the Fernwood Neighbourhood Resource Group

**Data updated as of May 2019

Although not focused specifically on food systems, the *My Great Neighbourhood Grants* and Participatory Budgeting have both funded projects related to urban food production and gardening.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Program Performance

As the GITC initiatives progress, staff are monitoring the performance of the program. GITC programs and policies have been effective; however, limited uptake or progress in some areas highlights opportunities to adjust City support for urban gardening and food production. Table 2 summarizes GITC initiatives, goals and results to-date.

Table 2. Summary of GITC Program Performance, 2015-2019

Goals	Initiatives	Results
Improve opportunities for residents to initiate and participate in community gardens	1. Review and update the <i>Community Gardens Policy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13 Expressions of Interest (Three in 2016; Eight in 2017; Two in 2018) Four new community gardens built on City land: two allotments and two commons
Help residents identify City lands for new community gardening projects	2. Inventory of City-owned land with community gardening potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 103 sites identified Sites displayed in Community Gardens Feature Map on Vic Map: http://vicmap.victoria.ca/CommunityGardens/

Help beginners and experts to garden on boulevards confidently and responsibly	3. <i>Boulevard Gardening Guidelines</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All 13 neighborhoods have boulevard gardens
Develop guidelines for food-bearing trees on City-held lands	4. <i>Urban Food Tree Stewardship Pilot Program</i> : residents can partner with a non-profit to plant and maintain up to five food trees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 new apple and hazelnut trees in James Bay (Charles Redfern Green, Ernest Todd Park)
Voluntary guidelines for food production in mixed use, multi-unit residential developments	5. New guide <i>Growing Food and Gardening in Mixed-Use, Multi-Unit Residential Developments</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide released in March 2019 Too early to assess impact
Review City regulations and policies to explore the opportunity for, and implications of, supporting expanded small-scale commercial urban agriculture	6. Bylaw amendments to enable small-scale commercial urban food production and small rooftop greenhouses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 businesses licenses granted to 10 producers. Producers can have up to two licences (on-site and off-site sales) Mixed vegetables, flowers and microgreens

Strategic Plan Objectives

Through the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan, Council provided direction to staff on a number of actions related to urban food production. In consultation with the Urban Food Table, staff have identified existing barriers and possible responses for Council to consider, to meet these strategic priorities. Table 4 provides an overview of the strategic actions and recommended approaches. Additional detail and considerations for each of the recommendations is provided in the section that follows.

Table 3. 2019-2022 Strategic Plan Actions

2019-2022 Strategic Plan Actions	Recommended Approach
Objective #5: 25. "Look for opportunities to increase food production on public land including increasing community gardens in all neighbourhoods in the city, and building urban food systems into our parks operations" (Ongoing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address City grant eligibility and create a new granting stream to support community garden start-up.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot a City-built allotment garden
Objective # 5: 15. a) "Look for opportunities to increase food production on private land" (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot City-sponsored spring distributions of gardening materials, in partnership with community organizations. Offer gardening/food production workshops, in partnership with community organizations.

Objective #5: 18. d) "Work with non-profits to bring back the <i>Sharing Backyards Program</i> " (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with potential partners (local governments, non-profits) to investigate the return of <i>Sharing Backyards</i>
Objective #5: 18 a) "... explore agriculture water rates for food production in the city on land that is used primarily for food production" (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invoice properties classified as Farm (Class 9) by BC Assessment at the CRD-subsidized agricultural rate

The recommendations will also help achieve outcomes aligned with the 2019-2022 Strategic Plan, including:

- Increase number of urban-agriculture related businesses (Objective # 4, Prosperity and Inclusion);
- Reduced use of food banks (Objective # 4, Prosperity and Inclusion); and,
- Increased local food security (Objective #5, Health, Well-Being and a Welcoming City).

OPTIONS & IMPLICATIONS

The following are presented for Council consideration:

Recommendation A: Expand City grant eligibility

Existing City grant programs may be updated to support the variety of programs now offered by GITC, and the start-up of new community gardens. Specific issues identified include:

- Neighbourhoods without an existing community garden, or with community gardens without food production, are currently not eligible to receive the Volunteer Coordinator Grant (\$10,000 per eligible neighbourhood).
- The Volunteer Coordinator Grant is limited to community gardens, which excludes other food production opportunities such as the Urban Food Tree Stewardship Program and Boulevard Gardening.
- There are currently no grants that support the convening, planning and design of new community gardens.
- Funds required to create community gardens often exceed available City grants. Activities and costs that include capital requests or have an impact to public space are ineligible for Strategic Plan funding. Community gardens are therefore currently not eligible to receive a Strategic Plan Grant, the largest pool of City funding.

Volunteer Coordinator Grant (existing stream)

Staff recommend revising the Community Garden Volunteer Coordinator Grant Terms of Reference, so representatives of all City neighbourhoods can apply (not just those with existing food producing gardens), and that volunteer coordination extends to the food tree stewardship program and boulevard gardens.

Financial Impact

In 2019 eight neighbourhoods are eligible to each receive the Volunteer Coordinator Grant. With the recommended adjustment, all 13 neighbourhoods would be eligible to apply. If they all submitted a successful application, the required annual funds to service this granting stream would increase from \$80,000 to \$130,000. If supported, this adjustment will be presented to Council for consideration as part of the Draft 2020 Financial Plan.

Start-Up Grants for Community Gardens (new stream)

Staff also recommend the creation of a new grant stream to support the start-up of new community gardens by community organizations. Staff suggest piloting a new grant in 2020, 2021, and 2022. This new granting stream would support the convening, planning, design, and capital requests associated with building, a new community garden.

Financial Impact

A supplemental request of \$30,000 and draft terms of reference for the new community garden start-up granting stream will be presented to Council for consideration as part of the Draft 2020 Financial Plan, if this action is supported.

Recommendation B: Pilot a City-built allotment garden

The OCP directs the City to support the establishment of at least one allotment per neighbourhood, where feasible (17.7). Currently, seven neighbourhoods do not have an allotment garden. All existing allotment gardens are fully subscribed and most waiting lists to access a plot are full. Victoria's increasing urban density is expected to further drive the demand for allotment gardens. Allotment gardens face unique and important challenges:

- They are expensive to build.
- The distribution of sites with allotment potential (flat area, sun exposure, and other uses) is not equal amongst neighbourhoods.
- The City's land base is limited, and allotments can conflict with community desire for more natural areas and un-programmed open spaces.

To address these challenges, staff recommend a pilot City-built, community-run allotment garden for consideration in 2021. This hybrid "City-built, community-run" model has recently been successfully implemented in other jurisdictions, such as View Royal Park (View Royal) and Gorge Park (Saanich).

The benefits of a City-built, community-run allotment garden may include:

- Ensuring the design and building process prioritizes safety and accessibility;
- Investing in adequate site preparation (e.g. drainage or levelling);
- Leveraging existing resources, such as staff expertise and City equipment;
- Exploring opportunities to use a site that may not be available otherwise.

Financial Impact

The 2021 implementation considers the time required for community consultation on potential design, siting and operating model. Any other associated operating and capital requests will be presented to Council through the financial planning process. External sources of funding such as grants, or Community Amenity Contributions could also be explored.

Recommendation C: Pilot City-sponsored distribution of gardening materials

Excess leaf mulch is available at no charge for resident pick-up at the Parks Yard, which usually requires the use of a vehicle. To increase access to gardening materials, staff recommend to pilot distribution of free gardening materials at up to three locations, in partnership with community organizations. Materials available could include leaf mulch, compost, woodchips and plants.

Financial Impact

Once project costing is completed, the associated supplemental operating and capital funding requests will be presented to Council for consideration as part of the Draft 2020 Financial Plan.

Recommendation D: Investigate the re-introduction of the Sharing Backyards program

Many community members do not have access to land to garden and grow food. A voluntary land-matching program is one way to help facilitate urban gardening and food production on private lands while building community.

Sharing Backyard was an online platform connecting landowners with available backyards and gardeners looking for a gardening space. Developed and operated by LifeCycles in early 2000, the program was terminated due to a lack of sustained funding for maintenance and upkeep. Several local non-profits have expressed an interest in *Sharing Backyards*.

In 2019, staff recommend helping convene potential partners (such as other local governments and non-profits) to explore collaboration opportunities to bring back *Sharing Backyards*. Although the City can be a partner in helping to relaunch such a program, the sustained delivery will require community leadership. Staff will report back to Council in 2020 to provide a progress update and identify specific options for the City to contribute to this program.

Supporting the convening process can be accommodated with existing staff capacity and workload.

Recommendation E: Support access to agricultural water rates

The CRD subsidizes agricultural water rates for water customers with properties that have obtained farm classification from BC Assessment and qualifying water consumption amounts. Currently there are no farms in Victoria with BC Assessment property farm classification. The City has no input into BC Assessment's property farm classification.

Currently, urban farm operators are not accessing CRD subsidized agricultural water rates because they do not have farm classification, and there is no City process to invoice qualifying customers at the agricultural rate. Once a property has achieved farm tax class through BC Assessment, the City could invoice at an agricultural water rate subsidized by the CRD.

Financial Impact

Providing access to CRD subsidized agricultural water rates has no impact on the City financially. Should an urban farm become eligible to receive the subsidized agriculture rate, administration support and systems programming will be required to develop and process the application.

Recommendation F: Establish food system targets and outcomes

In July 2018, staff presented the Parks and Open Spaces Master Plan (POSMP) Annual Progress Report. Subsequently, Council directed staff to "work with the Urban Food Table on identifying and tracking additional targets related to urban agriculture and food systems".

In the table below, staff propose targets, which reflect input received from the Urban Food Table and align with Council's strategic priorities.

Table 4. Target setting for urban agriculture and food systems

2019-2022 Strategic Plan Actions	2019 Benchmark	Proposed 2022 Target
Objective #5: 25. "Look for opportunities to increase food production on public land including increasing community gardens in all neighbourhoods in the city, and building urban food systems into our parks operations" (Ongoing)	77% of neighborhoods have a community garden. Neighbourhoods without allotments include Oaklands, South Jubilee and Gonzalez.	85% of neighborhoods have a community garden (includes orchards, commons, allotments).
	46% of neighborhoods have an allotment. Neighbourhoods without allotments include Oaklands; North Jubilee; South Jubilee; Rockland; North Park; Hillside/Quadra, Fairfield, Gonzalez).	75% of neighbourhoods have an allotment garden*.
	Approximately 230 plots in 7 allotment gardens, all fully subscribed.	Double the number of allotment plots.
	31% of neighbourhoods have community food trees (James Bay, Fernwood, Vic West, Fairfield).	100% of neighborhoods have community food trees (community orchard, food forest, or food trees introduced with stewardship program).
Objective # 5: 15. a) "Look for opportunities to increase food production on private land" (2020)	10 producers obtained businesses licences between 2016-2019.	Double the number of producers who obtained a business licence for small-scale commercial urban food production.
	Not available.	Track the number of condos and apartments with gardening space for tenants.

* The number of allotment plots in neighbourhoods with allotment gardens varies greatly. For example, there are approximately 9 allotment plots in Vic West and 75 in Downtown-Harris Green.

Beyond GITC: Supporting neighborhood food meal programs and food infrastructures

Staff are seeking clarification on the City’s goals and desired outcomes for the following two Strategic Plan actions:

- Objective #5: 18. c) "Support neighborhood food/meal programs" (2021 Action)
- Objective #5: 17. b) "Support food infrastructure including farmers markets, and storage and distribution" (2020 Action)

These objectives are complementary to, but not focused on, increasing urban food production and the GITC initiatives. Once further clarification is obtained from Council, staff can consult with the appropriate stakeholders to assess existing needs and opportunities in relation to food/meal programs and infrastructure. This assessment would also allow the City to gain a better understanding of current programs and infrastructure, including other regional initiatives targeting similar goals and objectives.

Accessibility Impact Statement

The recommendations outlined above are intended to help increase the number of accessible community garden beds. Increasing urban gardening and food production may also increase pollen count and provide habitat for stinging insects, which can affect residents, particularly those

living with allergies. Staff have developed guidelines, *Urban Gardening and Pollen Allergies in the City of Victoria*, for gardening and a low allergen plant list. This resource also offers tips to promote pollinators while also considering selection and placement and planting low allergen plants.

Impacts to Financial Plan

Where applicable, the recommendation's potential impacts will be presented for Council consideration as part of the annual financial planning processes.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

The recommendations support the OCP's objectives for a more food secure and sustainable urban food system.

CONCLUSIONS

As noted above, GITC programs, policies and bylaw amendments have generally been effective, and there are opportunities to adjust City support for urban gardening to better address food production objectives. The recommendations provided in this report align with Council's strategic priorities and help to remove barriers to food production on private and public land. Urban food production helps stimulate local economy, while community gardens foster place-making and bolster community gathering spaces. Staff recommend that Council approve the proposals highlighted in this report.

Respectfully submitted,




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Thomas Soulliere
Director,
Parks, Recreation and Facilities

Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager:


Date: May 29, 2019

List of Attachments

- Appendix A – GITC Planning Report
- Appendix B – GITC Parks Report
- Appendix C – List of GITC Resources